

SERJEANT WALTER FRANK BIRT

20240, 1st/6th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 34 on 3 November 1916

Remembered with honour on *Thiepval Memorial, France*; Pier and Face 5A and 5B

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross, in the Abbey,
and on the General Post Office Memorial at the Royal Mail Sorting Office, Northway



Thiepval Memorial, France



GPO Memorial, Northway



Gloucestershire Regiment

WALTER FRANK BIRT (often known as Frank) was not a native of Tewkesbury; he was born in Painswick in 1882 to Joseph Birt and Elizabeth (formerly Estcourt). Both came from Painswick and they had a total of 13 children, all born in Painswick. Eleven of the children were still alive at the time of the 1911 Census when the family was living in Libbiwell Lane, Painswick. Joseph died in 1918 at the age of 65.

Walter was a pre-war regular soldier in the Gloucestershire Regiment, his army service number suggesting his enlistment sometime in 1901. On completing his engagement, he returned to civilian life in Painswick and in 1911 was working with his father as a 'japanner'. In 1913 he joined the General Post Office, working as a postman at Birtsmorton; it is not clear where he lived in Tewkesbury, or for how long.

Walter Birt's medal records indicate that he re-joined the Gloucesters soon after the outbreak of war, probably as a reservist. He enlisted in Stroud and served initially with the 1st Battalion, with whom he was promoted to the rank of Corporal on 7 November 1914. Walter landed in France on 3 March 1915 to join his battalion, then part of the original BEF. The Battalion was part of the 1st Division and had taken part in most of the major actions during 1914 and 1915. Sometime after being posted to France, Walter was transferred to the 1st/6th Battalion, a Territorial unit formed in Bristol in August 1914, and promoted to Acting Serjeant. The battalion landed at Boulogne on 29 March 1915, nearly four weeks after Walter arrived in France, and

became part of the 48th Division.

In August 1915 Walter was badly wounded in two places and sent home. Whilst on leave he married Nellie Young of Thrupp on Christmas Day, 25 December 1915; they had a daughter, Mildred F. M., who was born in Stroud in 1917. Walter was sent back to the Front in September 1916, two months after the start of the *Battles of the Somme*. In the opening phase, the *Battle of Albert* (1-13 July 1916), the 48th Division held the line in the north but became involved in later phases of the campaign, including the subsequent *Battles of Bazentin Ridge* (14-17 July) and *Pozières Ridge* (23 July-3 September).

Sergeant Walter Frank Birt was killed on 3 November 1916, not in battle, but probably during routine trench maintenance, when a shell landed in the trench and killed him instantly, along with three of his men. The Battalion War Diary for that day noted: '*Working parties on trenches; 5 Other Ranks killed, 2 wounded*'. Walter was said to be '*a most capable leader of men*'. His body was neither recovered nor identified and he is commemorated instead on the *Thiepval Memorial*. He was awarded the '*1914-15 Star*' medal.

Despite his brief involvement with Tewkesbury, Walter is commemorated on the main Tewkesbury Memorials and, in addition, on that of the General Post Office (now Royal Mail) in Northway. At the time of the CWGC record, his widowed mother was living in the same house as in 1911 and his wife was living at 5 Glyn Terrace, Thrupp, Stroud.