

PRIVATE JAMES COLE

3/824, 1st Battalion, Wiltshire Regiment

Died aged 42 on 16 June 1915

Remembered with honour at the *Menin Gate Memorial, Ypres*; Panel 53

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



*Menin Gate Memorial,
Ypres*



*Pte. James Cole [Swindon
Local Studies Library]*



*Wiltshire
Regiment*

JAMES COLE was born in Tewkesbury in 1873. There were two births registered under that name in December 1873 and the evidence to identify which of the two is the soldier listed on the Roll of Honour is largely circumstantial. However, the research tends to support the conclusion that James was the son of Joseph Cole, a Waterman, and Elizabeth (formerly Long). Joseph was originally from Upton-on-Severn, Worcestershire, whilst Elizabeth was born in Tewkesbury. They were married in 1857 in Tewkesbury and had seven children, five sons and two daughters. Over the years the family lived at different addresses in Tewkesbury; in 1881 they were in Oldbury Road and in 1891 they were living in Gravel Walk.

Sometime during the 1890s, James joined the Army and served with the 1st Battalion, the Gloucestershire Regiment, in South Africa during the *Boer War*. The *Tewkesbury Register* reproduced a letter sent in October 1899 from a Private J. Cole of that battalion, stationed in Ladysmith, which commented that it was *'the hardest fight since Crimea ... It will be over in about a month, perhaps it might be more'*. In fact, half of the battalion was involved in an action known as the *Battle of Ladysmith* on 30 October 1899, in which 450 men of the battalion were forced to surrender after being surrounded and running out of ammunition, thereby becoming prisoners of the Boers.

In 1902 James had returned and married Daisy Sarah Mathews in Swindon, Wiltshire. In 1911 they were living at 101 Bright Street, Gorse Hill, Swindon, with their five children: James, Elizabeth, Joseph, Lena and Frederick. At the

time James was employed as a Forgerman Labourer in the local Railway Works.

Having previously served in the Army, James Cole was probably called up sometime after the outbreak of war as a Reservist in the 1st Battalion of what was by then his local regiment, the Wiltshire Regiment.

In August 1914 the battalion was based at Tidworth in Wiltshire under the command of the 7th Infantry Brigade in the 3rd Division. On mobilization, the battalion left for France on 13 August, arriving at Rouen the next day and taking part in the *Battle of Mons* ten days later, as well as the subsequent retreat. The 'retreat' was a fighting withdrawal with a number of significant actions fought along that route. The battalion remained intact and ended the retreat on the outskirts of Paris. Once the line stabilized, the battalion took part in the *First Battle of Ypres* which lasted from 19 October to 22 November 1914.

According to his medal rolls, James was posted to France on 28 November 1914, possibly as part of a replacement draft, which meant that he qualified for the *'1914-15 Star'* campaign medal. By the spring of 1915, the battalion had lost 26 officers and 1,000 men, the equivalent of a whole battalion. In June 1915 the battalion took part in an attack on the German trench system at Bellewaarde Ridge at the apex of the *Ypres Salient*.

Private James Cole was killed on 16 June 1915 in the confused and fierce fighting in the trench systems. His body was never identified or recovered and he is commemorated on the *Menin Gate Memorial* in Ypres.