

SERJEANT HENRY AUSTIN COOK

2340, 1st/5th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 36 on 20 July 1916

Remembered with honour on *Thiepval Memorial*; Pier and Face 5a & b

Commemorated in Tewkesbury on the Grammar School Memorial



*Thiepval Memorial,
Somme, France*



Sgt. Henry A. Cook
[Graphic 7/10/16]



*Gloucestershire
Regiment*

HENRY AUSTIN COOK was born in 1880 to George and Agnes Cook, who lived at Waterloo House, Bredon. This explains why Henry is not commemorated in Tewkesbury other than on the Grammar School Memorial. George was a building employer and also Chair of the Board of Guardians in charge of the Tewkesbury Workhouse (now Shephard's Mead, Gloucester Road). The Grammar School admitted pupils from the surrounding countryside and Henry's presence is recorded from 1893 to 1905. In 1911 he was working with his father as a bricklayer and was, according to his obituary, *'highly respected and very popular'*. He was a prize-winning runner, a cricketer and a footballer with the local team, Tewkesbury AFC.

The first issue of *'The Theocsbrian'* in December 1914 listed the names of *'36 Old Boys serving in His Majesty's Forces'*. The *Graphic's* obituary of Henry stated that *'he volunteered on 7 August 1914, collecting ten more comrades from the old company of Territorials, Bredon Hill section'*. This clearly indicates that Henry must have served in the Gloucestershire Regiment as a Territorial some time before the war (the 5th Battalion was the one that recruited in the Tewkesbury area). Such initiative and prior experience would explain his rapid promotion to Sergeant, as reported in the *Register* of October 1914. When Henry enlisted in the regiment in Gloucester at the outbreak of war, he indeed joined the 1st/5th Battalion, which was then part of the South Midland Division. He had evidently agreed to serve overseas and landed with the battalion on 29 March 1915 at Boulogne, when they soon became part of the 48th (South Midland) Division.

The first campaign in which the Division took part was the joint Anglo-French Somme offensive, now known as the *Battles of the Somme 1916* (1 July-18 November). In the opening phase of the offensive, the *Battle of Albert* (1-13 July 1916), the 48th Division was essentially holding the line in the north between Gommecourt and Serre. By the middle of July the 1st/5th Battalion had moved further south and entered the front-line in the Bouzincort sector. On 20 July three men were killed during the day and a further 45 in a local attack later that evening. The Battalion War Diary reported that: *'The attack was met with heavy shell and machine gun fire and failed to take its objective'*.

Sgt. Cook was killed in action on 20 July in one of these incidents, although it is not entirely clear which one. The *5th Gloucester Gazette*, the battalion newsletter, lamented that: *'many of the old hands have shed their blood'*. Although the chaplain reported that Henry had died of wounds, which would normally have meant a burial in a marked grave, his body was never recovered nor identified. It may well be, therefore, that his grave marker was destroyed in later fighting. Henry is commemorated instead on the *Thiepval Memorial* to the Missing of the Somme. Accordingly, the *Graphic* did not announce his death until October 1916.

Sgt. Cook was the second local member of the Territorial Force to be killed, following **Lt. Thomas Harold Moore** [†] of the same battalion, killed in 1915. Henry was awarded the *'1914-15 Star'* medal and this, together with his other two medals, is held by the regimental museum – the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum at Gloucester Docks.