

PRIVATE JOSEPH COOK

018855, 10th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 33 on 15 February 1919

Buried without military honour in *Tewkesbury Municipal Cemetery*; C-389

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



Tewkesbury Cemetery, Grave C-389



Pte. Joseph Cook



Gloucestershire Regiment

JOSEPH COOK was born in Tewkesbury in 1886, the eldest child of Mary Ann Cook, a single woman, working as a Collar Turner. In 1891 he was living in Scotts Alley with his maternal grandparents, Thomas and Hannah Cook, and in 1892 his mother married a bricklayer's labourer, John Howells. In 1901 Joseph was living in Double Alley, High Street, and in 1904 he married Annie Elizabeth Curtis. By 1911 he was a Drover, of Parkers Court, with children Doris and Gilbert. Three more children followed and another child was posthumous: William B.J. was born in the summer of 1919.

Joseph volunteered immediately after the outbreak of war; he enlisted in the Gloucestershire Regiment on 31 August 1914 and was posted to the new 10th (Service) Battalion formed at Bristol in September 1914 as part of Kitchener's Army. The battalion was soon involved in the *Battle of Loos* (25 September-18 October 1915), in which it suffered significant losses. It was the first battle in which poison gas was used by the British Army; despite heavy casualties, there was considerable success in breaking into the deep enemy positions near Loos but the opportunities could not be exploited, resulting in a costly stalemate.

According to his medal records Joseph landed in France on 4 October 1915, probably as part of a draft to replace the battalion's losses on the first day at Loos, and possibly in time to take part in a final attack on 13 October, which failed 'due to a lack of hand grenades'. The battalion lost 459 men, including **L/Cpl. A. Harrison, Cpl. Simms, Pte. Nunney and Sgt. Hall** [all †]. Joseph was awarded the '1914-15 Star' medal.

The official end of the battle brought little respite. The battalion then stayed in the trenches all winter, with routine deaths due to sniper fire and pneumonia, and did not see action again until July 1916 in the *Battles of the Somme*. By then, however, Joseph was no longer with them. He had been discharged on 13 January 1916 because of 'sickness'; he was awarded a *Silver War Badge* as evidence that he had undertaken military service and had been discharged because of wounds or illness.

Nothing further is known until 15 February 1919 when Joseph (now a bricklayer) was declared dead by Dr. Matthew Elder at his home in St. Mary's Lane. The cause of death was '*1. asthma & emphysema, 2. syncope*'. He was buried in *Tewkesbury Cemetery*, his widow paying £1.05p for the burial although '*W Claim*' appears against the grave and it may be that the state contributed 6s.6d. [38p] of this cost. This may explain the writing on the small headstone. Though not recorded by the CWGC, his name does appear on the Memorial at the Cross and in the Abbey. It may well be that this was the result of successful pressure by his family.

For the subsequent history of the family, descendants in Canada state that: '*Annie Elizabeth caught the Spanish flu and was unable to care for the kids. The government took the children away and put them in the Middlemore Home for Children which shipped the children old enough to work, to Canada.*' The family did settle there eventually with some success.

Joseph had a natural younger brother, **Private A. Cook**, who was wounded but survived the war.