

CORPORAL ALBERT JAMES DIDCOTE

3194, 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 34 on 8 October 1915

Remembered with honour on *Loos Memorial*; Panel 60 to 64

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



*Loos Memorial,
France*



Cpl. A.J. Didcote
[Graphic 13/11/1915]



*Gloucestershire
Regiment*

ALBERT JAMES DIDCOTE was born in Apperley in 1881, the eldest son of Thomas Didcote and Mary Letitia (formerly Price). Thomas was a waterman, also born in Apperley, whilst Mary came from Twynning. Of their 11 children, only six were still alive in 1911. In 1901 Albert was living in Jeynes Row with his mother, three brothers and a sister. At that time he was working as a corn porter but, by 1914, he had been employed for eight years at the Gas Works where he was known as a *'steady, respectable and conscientious man'*. In 1905 Albert married Lilian Wagstaffe, born in 1881, the daughter of Henry Wagstaffe. In 1911 they were living at 21 Gravel Walk with their three young children.

Albert enlisted in Tewkesbury in 1914, aged 33, as a volunteer in the Gloucestershire Regiment. He was drafted into the 1st Battalion, a regular unit in the 1st Division, one of the original formations in the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). The Division landed at Le Havre on 13 August 1914 and was involved in most of the major actions in the first year of the war. Albert joined his battalion in France on 7 April 1915 in time for the *Battle of Aubers* (9-10 May), where the Battalion was *'cut down without reaching the enemy'*, losing 262 men.

Four months later the battalion was involved in the *Battle of Loos* (25 September-18 October 1915), the largest British offensive mounted in 1915 which was undertaken in support of major French offensives. The *Register* reported: *'the battle took place ... in an area utterly unsuited to an attack ... before stocks of ammunition and heavy artillery were sufficient; the battle was noteworthy for the first use of poison gas by the*

British Army. Despite heavy casualties, there was considerable success on the first day near Loos but the opportunities could not be exploited, resulting in a costly stalemate.'

After this failure, a planned second attempt was disrupted by a German counter-attack on 8 October. The 1st Battalion was in the front line which felt the brunt of the attack. The Battalion War Diary noted that: *'Heavy bombardment ... continued increasing in intensity until about 4pm. Trenches considerably damaged.'* Despite heavy shellfire casualties among the defenders, British machine-guns destroyed the advance within 40 yards of the front-line and the German assault was repulsed with 3,000 casualties.

Corporal Albert James Didcote was killed in that action on 8 October, during the German counter-attack. Private Edward Sheldon of the same battalion claimed to have seen Albert fall and rescued his personal effects for his widow. However, Albert's body was never recovered and he is commemorated instead on the *Loos Memorial*. He was awarded the *'1914-15 Star'* medal. He left a widow and five children.

Albert was the second of three sons lost: the first was **Pte. Wilfred B. Didcote** [†], killed on 27 August 1915 at Gallipoli; the third was **Sgt. Harry F. Didcote** [†], who died on 12 January 1918 at Ypres. In addition, his father, Thomas, died in 1915 at the age of 62. His second son, Harry, accompanied Mrs. Mary Didcote when the War Memorial was unveiled in 1922.



**Mrs. Didcote, who had lost three sons
in the war, inaugurated the
Tewkesbury War Memorial in 1922**