

PRIVATE CHARLES HURCOMBE

2021, 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 20 on 21 February 1915

Remembered with honour at *Le Touret Memorial, France*; Panel 17

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



Le Touret Memorial, France



Pte. C. Hurcombe [Graphic 20/3/1915]



Gloucestershire Regiment

CHARLES ('CHARLEY') HURCOMBE was born in Tewkesbury on 27 February 1895 to William Henry Hurcombe and Sarah Ann (formerly Castle). William was from Gloucester and Sarah came from Gretton; they had eight children, although only five were still alive by the 1911 Census. William was a Carpenter in 1891 and died in 1899. By 1911 Sarah and four children were living in St. Mary's Lane. Charles attended the Abbey Schools and then worked for North the Printer and later Healing's Flour Mill. In 1911 both Charles and his older brother, Harry, are described as Miller's Porter at the Flour Mill. By 1915 Sarah was living in Smiths Lane and working as a Needlewoman.

At Easter 1914 Charles enlisted in Tewkesbury in the Gloucestershire Regiment; initially he joined the 3rd (Reserve), a training battalion which provided a form of part-time soldiering similar to the Territorial Force. With the outbreak of war in August, he would have been mobilised as a full-time regular. In November 1914, he was posted to the 1st Battalion, a pre-war Regular Army unit which was part of the 3rd Infantry Brigade, 1st Division, and landed at Le Havre on 13 August 1914. The Battalion was involved in much of the early fighting in 1914, such as the *Battles of Mons* (23-24 August), the *Marne* (7-10 September) and the *Aisne* (12-15 September), as well as the *First Battle of Ypres* (19 October-22 November). Charles arrived in France on 23 November 1914 to join his battalion, no doubt as part of a replacement draft to bolster its depleted ranks, and qualified for the '1914-15 Star' medal.

The date and circumstances of Charles's death are something of a mystery. The *Graphic*

and the *Register* both claimed that Charles was killed on 19 December 1914 at La Bassée and was declared officially missing on 20 January 1915. However, the date of death is shown on all surviving records as 21 February 1915. The date of 19 December is mystifying since, according to Wyrall's *Regimental History*, the battalion was in rest on that date. On the next day they took part in the *Battle of Givenchy* (18-22 December), an attack requested by the French to relieve pressure at Arras; the cost was 45 men killed, 109 wounded and 4 taken prisoner. A possible clue can perhaps be found in Charles's medal records which state '*found dead*' rather than the more usual term '*Killed in Action*'. When Charles failed to return from the attack on 20 December, it was possibly assumed that he had been killed or captured, but when it became clear that he was not a prisoner he was declared missing on 20 January 1915. On or around 21 February, perhaps his body was found, identified and given a battlefield burial, possibly in No Man's Land during a truce to organise burial of the dead (thus accounting for the note). During the next three years Charles's grave or any identification marker could easily have been lost or destroyed; consequently, at the end of the war, his body was not recovered or could not be identified and he is commemorated instead on the *Le Touret Memorial to the Missing*.

Charles's older brother, **Gunner Harry Hurcombe M.M. [†]**, Royal Garrison Artillery, was killed in 1917. His younger sister, Gertrude, born in 1898, was a familiar figure about the town in her hand-powered tricycle wheel-chair, recalls historian Brian Linnell. She was the last survivor of this well-known local family.