

PRIVATE DOUGLAS ROY HUTCHINSON

27953, 3rd Battalion, Worcestershire Regiment

Died aged 24 on 7 June 1917

Buried with honour in *Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord, France*; III B 262

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension



Worcestershire Regiment

DOUGLAS ROY HUTCHINSON was born in Tewkesbury in 1892, the only son of Joseph Hutchinson and Lavinia Georgina Roberts (formerly Cottrell). Joseph was a mechanical engineer, born in Liverpool in 1860, whilst Lavinia came from Tewkesbury where she was born in 1869 to Enoch and Susannah Cottrell of Glenhafren, Oldbury Road. In 1901 Joseph, Lavinia and Douglas were also living at Glenhafren but, by 1911, Lavinia and Douglas had moved to Fern Villa, Ashchurch Road, and Douglas was working as a bookstall clerk assistant. Joseph died between 1901 and 1911.

Douglas was probably conscripted into the Worcestershire Regiment in Birmingham, around April 1916 judging by his army service number. He served initially in the 2nd Battalion but was transferred at some stage to the 3rd Battalion. Both were pre-war regular battalions which were part of the original British Expeditionary Force that landed in France in August 1914; they went on to see action in numerous battles in the ensuing years. At the beginning of 1917, Private Hutchinson's battalion was under the command of the 74th Infantry Brigade in the 25th Division. By the middle of May, meticulous preparations were being made for the first phase of the *Flanders Offensive*, the capture of Messines Ridge south of Ypres. This was a prelude to the main assault, known as the *Battles of Third Ypres* (31 July-10 November 1917), whose ultimate objective was the capture of Passchendaele Ridge.

The *Battle of Messines* started at 3.10 a.m. on 7 June when 19 huge mines were detonated beneath the German trench systems on the ridge. The attacking infantry quickly overran the

devastated defences and, by 9 a.m., the entire length of the Ridge was in British hands. The 3rd Battalion played a leading part. According to the regimental history: *'Dashing to the front, the officers led their men forward over the front line and out into the open. There the platoons went forward beneath a tornado of shells ... In seven minutes from the start the enemy's front system of defences had fallen, almost without a blow. However, fire from German machine-guns checked the advance. The battlefield at dawn was an extraordinary spectacle. The surface of the ridge was torn and smashed in every direction by countless shell-holes'*. It was one of the most successful offensives of the war – but success came at a cost: 24 men were killed and 202 were wounded.

Private Douglas Roy Hutchinson was one of the casualties and died of wounds on 7 June 1917, the first day of the battle. The *Register* provided a comprehensive obituary on 16 June 1917: *'We regret to learn that Mrs. Hutchinson has received the sad news that her only son, Douglas Roy, has died from wounds received in action in France. The deceased was 23 years of age and an old pupil of the Council Schools. After leaving school he was for some time employed at Messrs. W. H. Smith and Sons (railway station) bookstall until he left on promotion, and was living in Buxton when he joined the army'*. After being wounded, Douglas was evacuated for treatment to Bailleul, a major hospital centre. Unfortunately, he succumbed to his wounds and was buried in *Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension*, Nord. A War Gratuity of £4 was awarded to his mother in October 1919.