

## PRIVATE HENRY WALTER MANN

107388, 14th Battalion, Machine Gun Corps

Died aged 20 on 21 March 1918

Buried with honour at *Ribemont Communal Cemetery Extension, Aisne*; British B 11

Not commemorated in Tewkesbury



*Ribemont Communal Cemetery Extension*



*Machine Gun Corps*

**HENRY WALTER MANN** was born in 1898 in Tewkesbury to Henry Mann and Fanny (formerly Taylor). He had an older step-brother, Albert George Taylor, born in 1893, and an older sister. Both Henry and Fanny came from Tewkesbury and the family lived at 7 or 8 Spring Gardens from 1901 to 1918. According to the 1911 Census, the marriage produced a total of 11 children, although only six were still alive at that time. Henry senior was a Brewer's Labourer in 1901; in 1911 he was working as a Bricklayer's Labourer whilst Henry junior, known as Walter, was still at school.

Although Henry was serving in the Machine Gun Corps when he was killed, he had previously served in the Gloucestershire Regiment. Judging by his regimental number he had probably joined the 4th Battalion, a Territorial Force unit, in 1917 as a conscript. He was subsequently transferred to the 14th Battalion, Machine Gun Corps, which was formed on 1 March 1918, just a matter of weeks before Henry was killed. It is likely, therefore, that Henry was a founder member of the unit which was created by a reorganisation within the Army; this saw the amalgamation of the four separate Machine Gun Companies in each infantry division into a single battalion. Each Machine Gun Battalion took its number from the Division with which it served, hence Henry's battalion was part of the 14th (Light) Division.

In March 1918 the 14th (Light) Division was part of the Fifth Army and held the front line south east of St. Quentin. There were no major defensible features of ground in the forward zone and the division was faced by more than three

German divisions. In the initial attack, the *Battle of St. Quentin* (21-23 March 1918), the forward defences of the 14th Division were overwhelmed and the surviving units were forced to retreat. The division suffered heavy casualties, particularly in the machine gun units which provided a key part of the first line of defence. The role of the Machine Gun Corps, 'first in – last out', led to it being dubbed the 'Suicide Club'.

**Private Henry Walter Mann** was undoubtedly killed on 21 March 1918 but no biographical obituary was published in the local newspapers and his death was not formally announced until 22 November 1919, a year after the end of the war. He was a casualty of the first phase, *Operation Michael*, of the German Spring Offensive also known as the *Kaiserschlacht*, the Kaiser's Battle (or the *Battles of the Somme 1918* to the British).

Despite the late notification of his death, Private Mann's body was recovered and identified after the war and he was buried in the *Ribemont Communal Cemetery Extension*, near St. Quentin.

Henry's mother, Fanny, had died in the June quarter of 1918 at the age of only 40, whilst he was still posted as 'missing'. Henry's infant sister, Alberta, had died only a short time previously in the December quarter of 1917.

Although Henry's death was eventually announced in the press in 1919, almost seven years before the list of names to be commemorated on the War Memorial at the Cross was finalised, his name was omitted, unlike that of his step-brother, **L/Cpl. Albert G. Taylor** [†], killed in Mesopotamia on 15 December 1916.