

CORPORAL AUSTIN CONRAD PAPPS

2701, 1st/4th Battalion, Royal Berkshire Regiment

Died aged 18 on 23 July 1916

Remembered with honour on *Thiepval Memorial*; Pier and Face 11 D

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross, in the Abbey,
on the Congregational Church Memorial and on the Grammar School Memorial



*Thiepval Memorial to
the Missing*



Cpl. Austin C. Papps
[Graphic 5/8/1916]



*Royal Berkshire
Regiment*

AUSTIN CONRAD PAPPS was born in 1898 into one of the leading commercial families in Tewkesbury. His father, Henry H. Papps, was the son of the founder of the Papps Haberdashery Stores which dominated the town at 144-145 High Street from the 1890s to the 1920s (today the Edinburgh Woollen Mill with Holland & Barrett). Austin's mother was Carrie Elstone Griffiths, who was born in Liverpool but by 1891 had moved to Tewkesbury to work in the business. Henry and Carrie married in 1893; Austin was the second surviving son. In 1911 Austin was still a schoolboy and the family was living at the firm's other premises at 7 High Street. Austin was educated first at the Council School and then at the Grammar School but, after leaving, he moved to Reading. By 1916 Austin's parents were living at Tudor Villa, Barton Road.

In Reading Austin enlisted as a 'Territorial' in the Royal Berkshire Regiment. In 1914 he was still only 16 years old but seems to have succeeded in staying in his battalion, when it was re-numbered as the 1st/4th prior to moving overseas. Austin disembarked with his battalion at Boulogne on 30 March 1915, part of the 48th (South Midland) Division. From then until early 1916 the battalion was mainly engaged in manning the trenches and patrolling. Although aged just 18 years, Austin was promoted to Corporal.

The battalion was not involved at the start of the joint Anglo-French Somme offensive in July, now known as the *Battles of the Somme* (1 July-18 November 1916). However, the 48th Division soon took part in the fourth phase of the

campaign, the *Battle of Pozières Ridge* (23 July-3 September 1916), when they supported the Australian Corps in its attempts, eventually successful but at a high cost, to capture and hold the key village of Pozières, located on a ridge of high ground between Albert and Bapaume. The role of his 145th Infantry Brigade was to carry out a night attack to capture German trenches to the west, whilst the Australians attacked from the south. The Battalion War Diary commented: '*Our attack began at 4am ... their shell fire was incessant from dawn till dusk ... the captured trenches being continually under fire ... the Battalion did well in the attack and later when holding the captured trenches*'. The battalion captured their objectives but, in the process, lost 128 killed, wounded and missing.

Corporal Austin Conrad Papps was killed in action on 23 July 1916. One witness stated that they were returning from having obtained information in a raid when a '*shell-burst instantly killed Corporal Papps*'. One of the men said: '*he was one of the best*', and another report states that he was '*bombing up the trench*'. His body was never recovered and he is commemorated on the *Thiepval Memorial*. He was awarded the '*1914-15 Star*' medal.

Austin's elder brother, **Aubrey Horace Papps**, served in France with the Royal Engineers and survived the war, perhaps because he was taken prisoner in April 1918. Their father was a stalwart of the Congregational Chapel and also an Alderman who, perhaps not surprisingly, played a leading role in commemorating the war dead with a new memorial at the Cross.