

PRIVATE ALBERT JAMES ENOCH PARSONS

108664, Machine Guns Corps (Infantry)

Died aged 26 on 13 August 1919

Buried with honour in *Tewkesbury Cemetery*; C-421

Not commemorated on a Memorial in Tewkesbury



Tewkesbury Cemetery



Albert, Ellen & Kate [C. Trust]



Machine Gun Corps

ALBERT JAMES ENOCH PARSONS (known as Bert) was born in Cranham, Gloucestershire, on 26 May 1893, the eldest child of Albert William Parsons and Eliza Jane (formerly Fownes). In the 1901 Census he was living at Well Alley, High Street, with his parents and three siblings. In 1911 the family still lived there (with a further son) and he was a Printer's Apprentice. In September 1913 he joined the Great Western Railway as a Cleaner and in October became a Shedman. He left the GWR on 10 May 1915 when he volunteered for Service. Bert married Kate Elizabeth Matthews in June 1914 at Bridgend, Glamorgan, and they had three children: Ellen (March 1915), John (died at six months), and Frank (January 1920).

According to the Abbey Volunteers' Memorial, Bert was posted to the 3/5 Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment, but went overseas with the 2nd/5th Glosters in May 1916 in the 61st Division. It did not take part in any *Somme* battles but was involved with Australians, in the *Battle of Fromelles* on 19 July 1916, in order to divert German troops from the Somme.

The *Tewkesbury Register* of 12 August 1916 published the following letter, of which Bert Parsons was a co-author: *'A Message from the Front with the 2/5th Glosters – somewhere in France, August 6th 1916. A few lines to let you know how the Tewkesbury "b'hoys" are sticking it out here. We have now been out here -- months, and ... have seen much fighting. We are now got quite used to the sound of gunfire and Fritz's iron rations (shells) being served out to us, and which out here are called coalboxes, rumjars, miniwerfers and whizzbangs. We have experienced several 'strafes' and seen many*

aeroplane duels. It is more than exciting during a bombardment, and we are all of the same opinion – that we shall not want to pay 6d again for admission to the Bell Bowling Green to see a firework display. ... We have met several Tewkesbury lads of other regiments out here, all of them like ourselves – anxious to be back in dear old Tewkesbury. ... Hoping we shall all meet soon, when an honourable peace has been proclaimed. (Signed) Ptes. Fred Boroughs, Charles Sandford [†], Thomas S. Cleal, Bert Parsons'.

Bert's transfer into the Machine Gun Corps probably occurred in August 1917, presumably on recovering from a wound (his family believe he was gassed). Transferees in France were sent retrained, and dispatched gradually to MGC companies. It is difficult for historians to establish any man's movements. Consequently, the MGC Company (and latterly Battalion) in which Bert served is unknown.

Bert survived the war and in 1919 was living at 75 High Street and working as a Platelayer on the railways. He died on 13 August 1919 and is buried in *Tewkesbury Cemetery*; his death certificate states that he accidentally drowned while bathing in the River Avon at 'The Witheys' at the Mythe. The fact that he has a CWGC headstone indicates that he was either still serving or receiving a pension. The *Tewkesbury Register* of 16 August 1919 contained a graphic report of his drowning and the Coroner's report of a *'sad accident'*. His family believed his breathing may have been impaired by his being gassed. Because his death was not deemed directly service-related, his name was not included on any memorials in Tewkesbury. His brother, **Frank**, survived the war but at the cost of his hearing.