

LANCE CORPORAL JOHN PARSONS

12577, 9th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 23 on 28 April 1917

Buried with honour in *Karasouli Military Cemetery, Greece*; D 799

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



Karasouli Military Cemetery



L/Cpl. J. Parsons



Gloucestershire Regiment

JOHN PARSONS was born in Tewkesbury in 1894 to John Parsons and Harriett (formerly Parker). Both came from Tewkesbury and they had a total of 15 children, of whom only six were still alive in 1911 – an unusually high mortality rate even for the time. In 1891 the family was living in Hughes Alley and John senior was working as a bricklayer's labourer. By the time of the 1901 Census, however, the family had moved to Birmingham and was living at 61 Essington Street. The move was temporary and the family returned to Tewkesbury before the next census. John was educated at the Abbey and British Schools (Barton Road) and was subsequently employed by Collins & Godfrey, the local building company and major employer. In 1911 the family was living at Parker's Court, Barton Street, but John senior was unemployed. At the same time, John was living with his older sister, Annie Elizabeth Harvey, in Aurora Passage, Church Street, working as a fishmonger. The infant mortality that her parents suffered also affected Annie; by 1911, only one of her five children born up to that point was still alive.

John volunteered in September 1914 'at the great meeting at the Watson Memorial Hall' and enlisted in the Gloucestershire Regiment. John was evidently attached to the Abbey as he was photographed for the *Tewkesbury Weekly Record Illustrated Supplement* (6 March 1915) as one of the 'Abbey Boys in the 5th Gloucester Reserve Battalion'. After local training, he was posted to the 9th (Service) Battalion, a Kitchener's New Army unit which was originally formed at

Bristol in September 1914 and came under the command of the 78th Infantry Brigade in the 26th Division. John landed with the battalion in France on 21 September 1915. The battalion spent just two months on the Western Front without seeing any action before being transferred to Salonika in Greece in November 1915, initially to provide support for the Serbs against German, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian forces. In 1916 the Salonika theatre was relatively quiet. Health and living conditions were the main enemy, large numbers of men succumbing to malaria, dysentery and other diseases rife in that area. The battalion was involved in the *Battle of Horseshoe Hill* (10-18 August 1916) when the Allies made an unsuccessful attempt to capture Bulgarian positions near Lake Doiran. After that, there was little activity except around the lake where 'the line was adjusted several times by each side'.

In spring the following year the Allied forces made a further unsuccessful attempt, in the shape of the *First Battle of Doiran* (24-25 April 1917), to defeat the Bulgarian army and achieve a breakthrough in the Balkans. In April 1917, the British attacked and gained a considerable amount of ground and resisted strong counter-attacks.

Lance Corporal John Parsons evidently took part in these operations, sustaining wounds from which he died some days later on 28 April 1917; he was buried in *Karasouli Military Cemetery*. John was awarded the '1914-15 Star' medal. It was at this time that **Private C. E. Garrett** [†] was also killed.