

LIEUTENANT STANLEY NOEL PRIESTLEY

8th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 27 on 23 July 1916

Remembered with honour on *Thiepval Memorial*; Pier and Face 5A and 5B

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



Thiepval Memorial, France



Lt. S.N. Priestley, 1907 (C.Burd)



Gloucestershire Regiment

STANLEY NOEL PRIESTLEY was born in Tewkesbury on 30 September 1888, the fourth son of Joseph Edward Priestley and Henrietta (formerly Rice). Joseph was the headmaster of the Abbey House School which, in 1899, merged with the Grammar School. The family name was originally Priestlay but seems to have evolved in the early 1900s. Stanley was educated at his father's school, where he excelled at cricket; in 1904 he took ten wickets for no runs. The brothers and their father all played cricket.

In 1908 Stanley joined the Territorial Force in the Tewkesbury Company (D) of the 5th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment, and served for four years, reaching the rank of Sergeant. In 1911 he was living at home and working as a miller's clerk but in 1912 he left Tewkesbury and followed his eldest brother, Joseph Hubert, to Leeds University where he became a member of the Officers' Training Corps. As a former member of the Territorial Force, Stanley volunteered for military service on the outbreak of war and applied for a commission in the 8th Battalion, granted on 29 December 1914. The battalion, formed in September 1914 as part of Kitchener's Army, was part of the 19th (Western) Division. Stanley landed with the battalion in France on 18 July 1915, thus earning the '1914-1915 Star' medal.

The 8th Battalion's first campaign was the *Battle of the Somme 1916*. The battalion did not participate in the disastrous first day but was involved in the capture of La Boiselle on 3 July as part of the *Battle of Albert*. Three weeks later the battalion was back in the front line at Bazentin-le-Petit and took part in one of the unsuccessful attacks on *High Wood*. The War

Diary entry for 23 July commented that: '*Attack failed, our casualties being one officer killed, five wounded and eight missing ... 186 casualties among other ranks*'.

Lieutenant Stanley Noel Priestley was one of the officers lost on 23 July 1916; he led 12 Platoon but did not return. One of his men reported: '*I saw him wounded and fall not far from the German Parapet. He struggled to his feet. I saw him stand and sway as I passed him. Parties went out that night to search for him but the body could not be found. It is possible that he is a prisoner of war, but I think from the way he fell that he must have died. He was made Captain the day of the charge*'.

In Tewkesbury, the dreaded telegram arrived: '*Regret to inform you that Lt. S. N. Priestley reported missing July 23. This does not necessarily mean he is wounded or killed. Any further news will be reported immediately*'. A month later the Medical Officer expressed the opinion that Stanley could not have survived. His death was not acknowledged by the War Office until 24 February 1917, when probate of his will could finally be granted. His body was eventually found in November 1917 and his identity tag returned to the family, who were then also grieving for the loss of another son, **L/Cpl. Donald L. Priestley** [†]. Although Stanley's body was found, it was never formally identified and he is commemorated instead on the *Thiepval Memorial* to the Missing of the Somme.

There was no posthumous confirmation of his promotion to Captain. His surviving brothers, **Captain J. H. Priestley, D.S.O.**, and **Major R. E. Priestley, M.C.**, famously flourished after the war in Academia.