

GUNNER WALTER ROBERTS

75449, 21st Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery

Died aged 24 on 2 July 1918

Buried with honour at *Canada Farm Cemetery, Elverdinge, Ypres*; IV B 13

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



Canada Farm Cemetery



Gunner Roberts at home on leave, 1917 [D. Symon]



Royal Garrison Artillery

WALTER ROBERTS was born in Tewkesbury in 1894, the eldest of three sons of William Henry Roberts and Martha Fanny (formerly Green), a notable baking family of 112 High Street. From 1838 to 1851 William Henry's father, Joseph Roberts, held the White Lion public house in Barton Street; after his death his widow, Hannah, and William Henry prospered as bakers. Walter attended Tewkesbury Grammar School and then 'assisted his father in the business'. Whilst on leave in February 1918, he married Rose Gwendolyn Jeffrey of Bath, a teacher at the Council Schools. At the time of his commemoration, she was evidently working as a teacher at CO Schools, GHQ, British Army of the Rhine, which occupied parts of Germany for several years after the war.

Walter enlisted as part of the 'Derby Scheme' in Tewkesbury on 10 December 1915 and was assigned to the Army Reserve. He was mobilised and posted to the Royal Garrison Artillery in Plymouth on 12 April 1916. He was then allocated as a Gunner to 340th Siege Battery in January 1917 and was sent to France a few months later, disembarking at Le Havre on 30 May 1917. Walter was wounded the following month in the elbow but was reported to be progressing satisfactorily in a convalescent home. On 21 September he was assigned to the 21st Siege Battery which was one of the artillery units attached to the Fourth Army, at least up until December 1917. This battery was responsible for operating four 9.2 inch Howitzers.

Gunner Walter Roberts was killed in action on Tuesday 2 July 1918 in the Ypres sector of

Belgium. At this time the Fourth Army was located much further south in France, around the Amiens area, so it is likely that the 21st Siege Battery had been transferred by the time of Walter's death to the Second Army which was responsible for the defence of Ypres.

The *Tewkesbury Register* reported comments from his Commanding Officer that he was killed 'on the spot' while 'his gun was in action ... I had promised to recommend him for a commission'. There was no major action taking place in the Ypres area in July. The attempt by the Germans to capture the city during *Operation Georgette*, the second phase of the German Spring Offensive (the *Battle of the Lys 1918* or *Fourth Battle of Ypres* to the British), had finished by the end of April with Ypres still in Allied hands. It is probable, therefore, that Walter was killed during a routine exchange of artillery fire. He is buried in *Canada Farm Cemetery*, Elverdinge, near Ypres in Belgium.



Walter's death was commemorated in 1919 by Tewkesbury Grammar School and then, uniquely, by his widow Rose who, in 1923, brought to Tewkesbury the temporary wooden marker from his original grave; the marker is still displayed in the Abbey today.

Walter's younger brother, Gilbert, a dentist, joined the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) in August 1915 and survived the war.