

PRIVATE CHARLES SANDFORD

37826, 12th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 24 on 22 April 1917

Remembered with honour at the *Arras Memorial, France*; Bay 6

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



Arras Memorial, France



Pte. C. Sandford



Gloucestershire Regiment

CHARLES SANDFORD was born in 1893 to Thomas Sandford, from Ashchurch, and Elizabeth (formerly Picken) from Shropshire; Thomas was a cellarman at a brewery. They had a total of nine children of whom eight were still alive in 1911. In 1891 the family was living in Gravel Walk but they had moved to Oldbury Road by 1901. Thomas died in 1906 aged 59. In 1911 Elizabeth was living with four children in Providence Place, and Charles was working as a watchmaker's apprentice for Mr. Askwith, Jeweller at the Cross.

When war broke out Charles found himself 'in a situation in Wales ... when he immediately joined the ranks in service of his King and Country' on 10 January 1915. Charles was one of the 'Abbey Boys in the 5th Gloucester Reserve' photographed for the *Record Illustrated Supplement* on 6 March 1915. Initially posted to the 2nd/5th Home Service Battalion, Charles remained in the UK until conscription was introduced in 1916. All second-line units then becoming liable for overseas service, his battalion landed in France on 23 May 1916. In August 1916 Charles signed a letter back home to the editor of the *Register*: 'A few lines to let you know how the Tewkesbury "b'hoys" are sticking it out here'. At some stage after 21 November 1915, the 12th Battalion in France transferred to the 5th Division.

In spring 1917, the division took part in the *Arras Offensive* (9 April-16 June). This was designed to attract German reserves away from a major French assault being launched a week later, promised as a decisive breakthrough by its commander, Nivelle. The British achieved con-

siderable success initially, in particular in the capture of Vimy Ridge. However, the *Nivelle Offensive* failed to deliver its promise, leading to mutinies in the French Army. As a result, the British Expeditionary Force was compelled to continue at Arras longer to keep pressure on the German forces. The battalion was in reserve during the Canadian attack on Vimy Ridge but, on 19 April, they took over part of the front line. Their position was shelled for several days, their Commanding Officer reporting: 'the Battalion had a rough time, especially from shelling – one platoon of 'A' Coy being blown up by a shell that penetrated their cellar'. Specifically, heavy German shelling on 22 April resulted in 19 casualties.

Private Charles Sandford was one of those killed on that day. Sgt. Frank Kitching of the 1st/5th Battalion (a fellow Abbey Boy and apprentice at Askwith's), received word of Charles's death and decided to make enquiries, receiving this reply: 'it appears I'm the only one left to give you the information you require ... your friend Sandford was attached to LG (Lewis Gun) team. A shell burst in the trench & buried the whole team, some of the boys immediately dug them out but I'm sorry your friend had been killed ... his death was instantaneous. He was buried some distance behind the line ... there is a wooden cross erected to his memory'. Evidently Charles's grave was lost in later fighting as his body was never recovered; he is commemorated instead on the *Arras Memorial*.

Frank Kitching survived the war and served with the Royal Irish Constabulary in Dublin in 1921.