

PRIVATE ROBERT CECIL SAYER

1781, 1st/5th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 19 on 8 September 1916

Buried with honour at *Abbeville Communal Cemetery, France*; III F 21

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



Abbeville Communal Cemetery



Pte. R.C. Sayer



Gloucestershire Regiment

ROBERT CECIL SAYER was born in Tewkesbury in 1896 to Frederick William Sayer of Tewkesbury and Emma Jane (formerly Holder) from Bishop's Cleeve. Frederick worked as a house painter and later as a printer. Frederick and Emma had a total of nine children by 1911. The family lived for some years at 8 Barton Road. Robert was an old boy of Holy Trinity Schools and a member of the YMCA; in 1911 he was working as an ironmonger's apprentice. In the census returns for 1901 and 1911 his forename was recorded as Cecil, not Robert. In addition, the spelling of Robert's surname on the military records that have survived varies between Sayer (with which his birth was registered) and Sayers.

Robert enlisted in Tewkesbury around February 1913 judging by his army service number and joined the 5th Battalion, a Territorial Force unit formed in April 1908. Territorial Force battalions were mobilised shortly after the outbreak of war and Robert was posted to the 'first line' unit, the 1st/5th Battalion containing those men who agreed to serve overseas. He landed with the battalion on 29 March 1915 at Boulogne when they soon became part of the 48th (South Midland) Division. Accordingly, he was awarded the '1914-15 Star' medal.

The first campaign in which the Division took part was the *Battles of the Somme 1916*. In the opening phase, the *Battle of Albert*, the Division was essentially holding the line in the north between Gommecourt and Serre but was involved in the *Battles of Bazentin Ridge* and *Pozières Ridge*. Robert was wounded in the thigh when 'he was hit shortly after carrying in Lieutenant Percy Badham', son of the Town Clerk.

This action can be pinpointed to 21 July, the date on which the Battalion War Diary recorded that Lt. Percy Badham was wounded during an unsuccessful attack in the area of La Boiselle.

Private Robert Cecil Sayer died some weeks later on 8 September 1916 from a 'serious chest wound', after being evacuated to Abbeville, the site of several base hospitals. He died in No.1 South African General Hospital and was buried in *Abbeville Communal Cemetery*. It is not clear when Robert suffered the second wound but in the preceding weeks the War Diary recorded numerous incidents which resulted in casualties. His father, Frederick, was granted a War Gratuity of £9 on 5 November 1919.

Two of Robert's older brothers also served. **Charles Sayer(s)** joined the Gloucestershire Regiment and served in a number of different battalions. He was wounded in August 1916 and in 1917 was reported to be suffering from malaria after his battalion moved to Salonika; it was feared that Charles would die but he did survive. **Harry Sayer(s)** was a Bombardier in the Royal Artillery and was wounded in 1917. Robert's eldest brother, **Harold**, did not enlist and was living with his family and working in London as a printer, when they were badly injured in a *Zeppelin* attack on 31 May 1915. His daughter, Bunty, still bears a scar.

Bob Sayers (with a recently added 's'), teacher at Chance Street School and recent emigrant to Australia, was named after his uncle, who was related by marriage to Mrs. A. Langley (née Askwith). Her uncle **Bert Askwith** had a leg amputated after a serious accident as a despatch rider in 1916.