

## PRIVATE CHARLES SIMONS

202059, 1/4th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 37\* on 26 April 1917

Buried with honour at *Etretat Churchyard Extension, Le Havre, France*; I D 17

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



*Etretat Churchyard Extension*



*Gloucestershire Regiment*

**CHARLES SIMONS** was born in Tewkesbury in 1880\* to William Simons and Priscilla (formerly Meredith). William was a labourer and roadman from Tewkesbury, whilst Priscilla was born in Ledbury. They had six children, of whom four were still alive in 1911. The family lived at various times in Lewis Buildings (Gravel Walk), Bishops Alley and Machine Court. In 1901 and 1911 they were living in the neighbouring village of Walton Cardiff. In 1911 Charles was single and living at home: his occupation was described as a maltster and he was employed for many years at Downings Malthouse (the site of the Maltings Residence in Station Street). William died in 1915 at the age of 76 and, in 1917, Priscilla had moved to Post Office Alley.

Judging by his army service number, Charles enlisted in Tewkesbury in the Gloucestershire Regiment in April 1916, probably as a conscript. He was posted to the 1st/4th (City of Bristol Battalion) which had been formed in August 1914 in Bristol. The battalion landed at Boulogne on 30 March 1915 when they soon became part of the 145th Infantry Brigade, 48th (South Midland) Division. The first campaign in which the division took part was the *Battles of the Somme* (1 July-18 November 1916). After completing his training, Charles would most likely have joined his battalion towards the end of 1916 as part of a replacement draft. By the spring of 1917 the battalion was in pursuit of the Germans as they carried out a strategic withdrawal from the Somme known as the *German*

*Retreat to the Hindenburg Line* (14 March-5 April 1917), during which the division captured Peronne. Occasionally the Germans would make a stand which required an attack by British forces to maintain the momentum of the advance.

Towards the end of April 1917, the battalion was operating in the St. Emilie area, near Peronne. On 24 April the battalion was ordered to participate in an attempt to capture a strong-point known as the '*Knoll*', near the village of Lempire. Although initially successful, the battalion was forced to retire to avoid being surrounded and withdrew to Lempire. It is reasonable to assume that Charles was taking part in the attack when he was seriously wounded in the leg, arm and head. Evidently, he was evacuated to the town of Etretat on the French coast, near Le Havre, and treated at No.1 General Hospital which had been established there in 1914.

**Private Charles Simons** succumbed to his wounds and died on 26 April 1917 before he could be repatriated to the UK. He was buried in *Etretat Churchyard Extension* near the hospital. A War Gratuity of £1.6s.8d. was awarded in August 1919 to each of his three siblings.

Charles's nephew, **Ernest William Simons** [†], a Signal Boy in the Royal Navy, died in February 1916; he is buried in Tewkesbury Cemetery.

[\*The CWGC record shows Charles's age in 1917 as 40 but this would seem to be incorrect.]