

PRIVATE THOMAS CHARLES UNDERWOOD

18270, 13th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 37 on 25 March 1915

Buried with honour in *Tewkesbury Cemetery*; C-7

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



*Tewkesbury Cemetery,
Grave C-7*



*Pte. T. Underwood
[Graphic 24/4/1915]*



*Gloucestershire
Regiment*

■ Pte. Thomas Underwood was the first Volunteer from Tewkesbury to die in WW1 ■

THOMAS CHARLES UNDERWOOD was born in Tewkesbury in 1878, the son of Frederick Thomas Underwood, a labourer, and Martha (formerly Birchley). In 1881 the family, including five children, was living in Well Alley. In 1891, aged only 13, Thomas was boarding with a family in Cwmbran, Monmouthshire, and working as a coalminer. By 1899, however, he had returned to Tewkesbury and had married Sylvia Hannah Gardner and raised six children. In 1911 the family was living in Double Alley, High Street, and Thomas was a roadman for Tewkesbury Corporation. Thomas was a local cricketer, also serving in the Militia before 1908. In 1910 he was one of *'an interesting gathering [of] the goodly number of veterans and reservists, who wore the medals they had earned in the service of the Crown'* for the service of commemoration after the death of King Edward VII in 1910.

Thomas volunteered on 1 February 1915, during a *'large recruiting meeting in Tewkesbury where the speaker stirred the undecided men of the town into joining up. 5 men are reported to have enlisted at the meeting. One of those who took the King's shilling was Thomas Underwood'*, then living in Spring Gardens. No doubt utilising his earlier experience as a roadman, he was drafted into the 13th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment, a pioneer battalion containing many men who had been miners. Within six weeks, however, Thomas was dead: he caught a cold, presumably during training, which turned

into pneumonia.

Private Thomas Charles Underwood died in Malvern Hospital on 25 March 1915 aged 37. He was accorded a military funeral in his home town, where his officer, Lieutenant Parish, led a firing party of thirty men. The event was covered in the *Malvern Gazette*, the *Dean Forest Mercury* and the *Tewkesbury Weekly Record*. Moreover, there was another series of benefit concerts, which raised over £80 from his comrades and the townspeople of Malvern.

The story does not end here, certainly for his bereaved family. The impact of a soldier's death is revealed in the *Malvern Gazette* of 5 June 1915 which published a letter from the Reverend Smith, Vicar of Tewkesbury, indicating that three of Thomas's six children had been taken into homes of the Church of England's Waifs and Strays Society. This was despite *'the receipt of your cheque for £81.10s., being the proceeds of the entertainment so generously given by Malvern residents. The 'Underwood Fund' should be expended, as need arose by paying the rent of the widow's house, and providing the children with clothing, etc., when her 'separation allowance' ceases: but that none of it should be actually handed to her in cash. At present, she is still in receipt of the allowance from Government.'*

Thomas's grave can be found in *Tewkesbury Cemetery*. His widow, Mrs. Sylvia Underwood, died in 1927 at the age of only 46; the precise fate of his children is not known.