

**PRIVATE ALBERT CHARLES WOODHALL\***

92507, 14th Devonshire Regiment (Labour Corps)

Died aged 41 on 2 October 1917

Buried with honour at *Coxyde Military Cemetery, Belgium*; IV D 21

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



*Coxyde Military Cemetery, Belgium*



*Devonshire Regiment*

**ALBERT CHARLES WOODHALL** was born in Cirencester in 1876, one of four sons of John and Lucy Woodhall; there were also two daughters. In the 1881 Census Lucy and four of the children were living at 3 Crooked Alley; her occupation was shown as a 'Trunkmaker (Box)'. In 1891 she was living at Saffron Walk with three of the children but her husband was then in Banbury, Oxfordshire, with George and Albert (shown on the Census as Burt Wodhull\*), all working as Labourers. By 1901 Albert had moved to Birmingham and, in 1902, he married Hannah Louise Harrison in King's Norton. According to the 1911 Census, they had three children, then aged from 4 to 7. They were living at 32 Court 2 House, Hope Street, Birmingham, and Albert's occupation was given as 'Carter'.

Albert was conscripted on 28 August 1916. He enlisted at Reading two days later in the 14th (Labour) Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment which had been formed in Plymouth that same month. The battalion landed in France in October 1916 and joined the Third Army.

Although the army was able to use some railways, steam engines and tracked vehicles for haulage, the immense effort of building and maintaining the huge transport network, buildings, camps, and communication systems, relied on horse, mule and human effort. Some infantry regiments formed works battalions but the organisation of manpower was haphazard until the formation of the Labour Corps in January 1917. This was manned by officers and other ranks who had been medically rated below the 'A1' condition needed for front-line service; Albert was classed as 'B2' – not surprising given

that he was 40 years old at enlistment.

In April 1917, a number of infantry battalions were transferred to the Corps including the 14th Devons which became the 154th and 155th Labour Companies. The Corps always suffered treatment as something of a second-class organisation: for example, the men who died are commemorated under their original regiment, with Labour Corps being secondary. Hence, Albert's official military records show the Labour Corps as his last unit whereas the regimental badge and title of his parent regiment, the Devonshires, are engraved on his headstone.

**Private Albert Charles Woodhall's** death was reported in the *Tewkesbury Register*: 'Pte. Albert Woodhall [\*] was killed by enemy aircraft on October 2nd', probably somewhere in the Ypres area. This is near the Belgian coast, some 10 miles behind the front line of 1917, to the north of Ypres. His death was probably due to the bombing of British rear positions to disrupt preparations for the next phase of the *Third Battle of Ypres*, the *Battle of Broodseinde*, which took place on 4 October. Albert is buried at *Coxyde Military Cemetery*, where five other soldiers from the 155th Labour Company, killed on 2 October (most likely in the same bombing incident), are also buried. As with Albert's grave, their headstones are engraved with the badge and title of their parent regiment, the Devonshires, rather than the Labour Corps.

[\* Albert Charles was registered at birth with the surname Woodhall. However, the newspaper and some civilian records mistakenly use other versions: Woodhull, Wodhull and Wodhall. The correct spelling appears in the military records.]