

PRIVATE FREDERICK JAMES WOOLCOTT

16440, 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment [later 385768, Labour Corps]

Died aged 42 on 25 August 1920

Buried with honour in *Tewkesbury Cemetery*; C-472

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



Tewkesbury Cemetery
Grave C-472



Pte. F.J. Woolcott
[Graphic 1915]



Gloucestershire
Regiment

FREDERICK JAMES WOOLCOTT was born in Tewkesbury in 1878, the eldest son of Albert William Woolcott and Sophia (formerly Peart). Albert was a Labourer, born in Tewkesbury, and Sophia came from Woolstone, near Gotherington. They had 12 children, 10 of whom were still alive in 1911; the family lived in Fletchers Alley, Barton Street, from 1891 to 1911. By 1901 Frederick had left home to live with his uncle and aunt, John and Amy Peart, at 8 North East Terrace, and worked as a Blacksmith's 'Striker'. Then, on 2 March 1901, it was reported that he had volunteered for service in South Africa with the 2nd Volunteer Battalion. His father died in 1908 aged 53 and his younger brother, Thomas, died in 1911 aged 18. At that time, Frederick lived with his widowed mother and worked as a Bricklayer's Labourer whilst Sophia made ends meet as a Charwoman.

Frederick enlisted as a regular in the Glosters by early 1915 and was posted to the 1st Battalion, arriving in France on 18 February 1915. Part of the British Expeditionary Force, it was part of the 3rd Infantry Brigade, 1st Division. In May 1915 Frederick was mentioned in a letter from Private Woodward who wrote that *'he is proud there are so many Tewkesburians with the 1st, and they had experienced some very severe fighting'*. He mentioned the heavy fighting on 9 May (*Battle of Aubers*), and the fortunate escape of the men of Tewkesbury. He says they *'would be grateful for cigarettes, and a few papers would be very acceptable in the trenches'*.

In October 1915, the *Tewkesbury Register* reported that Frederick had been wounded by being shot through the arm, almost certainly at

the *Battle of Loos*. The Battalion remained on the Western Front for the rest of the war, taking part in most of the major campaigns such as the *Battles of the Somme 1916, Third Ypres 1917, the German Spring Offensive 1918* and *'The Last Hundred Days' 1918*.

In August 1918 Frederick was once again wounded in action. It was said that he was serving with the Royal Sussex Regiment but his medal roll records no change of regiment. Frederick had been gassed, but he tellingly claimed that *'I am going on grand, having recovered my eyesight'*. After recovery, he was transferred to the Labour Corps until demobilised and on 29 April 1919 was posted to the Class Z Reserve, established to enable trained men to return to civilian life but with an obligation to return to duty if hostilities were resumed; it was abolished on 31 March 1920.

Private Frederick James Woolcott died on 25 August 1920, his obituary in the *Register* suggesting that his death was a result of being gassed; the *Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum's* database does indeed give the reason for death as 'Died of wounds'. Frederick was buried in *Tewkesbury Cemetery*: *'His coffin was draped in a Union Jack, was borne by a party of employees from the Borough Flour Mill and followed by a number of discharged soldiers.'* His grave is maintained by the CWGC. His name was a late addition to the Abbey's *Memorial to the Fallen*, but he was included at the Cross in the normal way. Frederick's brother, **Private Albert William Woolcott** of the 10th Glosters, survived the *Battles of Loos* and the *Somme* in 1916, despite being wounded.