

ALBERT LOTT WHALE

Sapper

1st Battalion Royal Engineers 255th Tunnelling Coy.

Service No: 156003

Died: 15 January 1917. Died of Wounds, aged 20

Albert Lott Whale was the youngest son of Walter and Mary Ann Whale (nee Bidmead), born in Beenham and baptised in St. Mary's church on 25 December 1896. Walter was from Sydmonton, Hants whilst Mary Ann was a local girl who, prior to her marriage in 1879 was a domestic servant for George & Hannah Layley, the village baker & grocer. Albert's name does not appear on the war memorial.

In their early married years Walter and Mary Ann lived on The Green, Beenham but by 1891 they had moved to Mount Pleasant with their five children Edward 11, George 9, William J 7, Walter 5 and Alice 3. By this time Albert is described as a Drayman. Ten year later in 1901, Walter now 41 and a grocer & shopkeeper, is living with his family on Beenham Hill. Of their children William J, 17 is a postman and Walter 15, a gardener. By this time two more children have been born, Francis James, 8 (b 12 May 1892 bp 5 June 1892) and Albert Lott now aged 4.

For reasons unknown, perhaps prompted by the death of Albert in early 1902, by 1911 the family have moved to South Wales to Aberdare, Glamorganshire. At this time Mary Ann, 57 now a widow, had been married for 31 years having had 11 children 7 of whom were living. Three of her boys, Francis James 18, Stanley Arthur 16 and Albert Lott 14 are described as coal miner boys.

On 7 Dec 1914 shortly after the start of the war, Albert Lott Whale enlisted as private 15816 aged 19 into the Princess Charlotte of Wales's (Royal Berkshire) Regiment at Aberdare, Glamorgan giving his address as 27 Wellington St., Robertstown, Nr. Aberdare. He was described as being 5ft 4ins tall and weighing 128lbs. He was posted to France on 18 March 1915.

Early in 1916 he requested a transfer to the Royal Engineers and on the 5 January became a Sapper with the 255th Tunnelling Company. The 255th was one of the tunnelling companies of the Royal Engineers created by the British Army during World War I. The tunnelling units were occupied in offensive and defensive mining involving the placing and maintaining of mines under enemy lines, as well as other underground work such as the construction of deep dugouts for troop accommodation.

255th Tunnelling Company was engaged in digging of subways to the Vimy front in early 1917, specifically in the Calonne-Souchez area. At this time the 255th also constructed two 50,000-gallon underground water reservoirs, for the supply of forward troops in the Vimy attack of April 1917.

Exactly how and where Albert died is unclear. In 1917 his mother Mary Ann received a telegram from the War Office announcing the death of her son at a casualty clearing station. By 4 December 1919, his was living at 74 Redcliffe St., Rodbourne, Swindon and in official correspondence she recorded the siblings of Albert to be Edward 40, George 38, Thomas 34, Frank 28, Henry 26 and Alice 32 (m Hillier). All were living in Aberdare.

On 6 April 1921 Albert was awarded the 1914-1915 Star, British War Medal & Victory Medal, signed for by his mother. He is buried at plot I. A. 6. Fosse No.10 Communal Cemetery Extension, Sains-en-Gohelle. Perhaps befittingly, Sains-en-Gohelle is an old mining village 20 kilometres north of Arras in the direction of Bethune. Fosse 10 is by an old mine and group of miners houses on the southern outskirts of the village, approximately 10 kilometres west of Lens.