

FREDERICK CHARLES WEBB

Private

2nd/8th Bn. Worcestershire Regiment

Service No: 263047

Died: 31 March 1918. Killed in Action, aged 35

According to some sources, Frederick Charles Webb was born and baptised in Beenham on 2 December 1883 but other references suggest he was born on 10 October; either way his birth was registered at Bradfield in the last quarter of that year.

Frederick's parents were George (b1848 Fareham, Hants) and Sarah Webb (née Usher, of Wickham, Hants) and he was one of at least seven children all born and baptised at Beenham: George (bp 7 Jan 1872), Kate (20 Jul 1879), Lydia (bp 3 July 1881), Frederick, Sydney (bp 2 May 1886), Ellen (bp 5 Aug 1888) and Rose (bp 3 Aug 1890).

At the time of the 1881 census the George and Sarah were living on The Green next to the Methodist chapel with six children: George 9, Sarah Ann 6, William Henry 5, Florence 3, Kate 1 and Lydia 1 month; George the elder is recorded as a gamekeeper.

Ten years later, the family were still living on The Green; George 40, now an agricultural labourer, Sarah 41, and their children George 19, Kate 10, Lydia 10, Frederick 7, Sydney 5, Ellen 2 and Rose 10 months.

The 1901 census shows Frederick aged 17 to be living on Beenham Hill with his mother, Sarah 41, now widowed, together with Kate 21, Sydney 15, Ellen 12 and Rose 10. Sarah is employed doing laundry work, Sydney a carter's boy on a farm, Frederick a domestic under gardener and the two younger girls still at school. Frederick's sister Sarah Ann, then 21 was a housemaid to Percy John de Paravicini, an English amateur cricketer and international footballer living in Datchet.

By 1911 Frederick had moved to Baughurst, near Tadley. Now aged 27 he is single and employed as domestic gardener at Heath End House, together with fellow gardener William Joseph Stroud. Four years later, Frederick married Dorothy Appleby (b1888), the marriage being registered at Kingsclere in the last quarter of 1915. Frederick and Dorothy went on to have a son, Frederick Jesse Webb (b 9 Aug 1916, registered Kingsclere, d1987).

When and where Frederick enlisted is not known but at the time of his death he was serving as Private 263047 with 2nd/8th Bn., Worcestershire Regiment. The 2/8th Battalion was a territorial force, formed at Worcester in September 1914 as a home service 'second line' unit. In February 1918 it was part of the 182nd Brigade, 61st Division.

Frederick was killed in action on Sunday 31 March 1918 although the specific details are lacking. He is commemorated on the Pozieres Memorial, Panel 41, Department de la Somme, Picardie. This location and the date of his death would suggest that Frederick was involved against the German spring offensive of 1918 known as Operation Michael, a major German assault that began on 21 March 1918. It was launched from the Hindenburg Line, in the vicinity of Saint-Quentin.

Its goal was to break through the Allied (Entente) lines and advance in a north-westerly direction to seize the Channel ports, which supplied the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and to drive the BEF into the sea. Two days later General Ludendorff, the Chief of the German General Staff, changed his plan and pushed for an offensive due west, along the whole of the British front north of the River Somme. This was designed to separate the French and British Armies and crush the British forces by pushing them into the sea.

Frederick's wife Dorothy, still living at The Laurels, Baughurst, Hants. was in receipt of his two medals, Victory, and British. As well as the Beenham war memorial, Frederick is commemorated on both Tadley and Baughurst war memorials.

Frederick Charles' elder brother George also served in the war and survived. He enlisted at Reading into 13th The Somerset Light Infantry on 30 July 1918 aged 46 and 9 months. At that time he was a bricklayer, married to Mary (née Fremantle) and had four children Elsie Rose 12, Nora Ellen 8, George Gilbert (b17 Jul 1906) and Lenna Kate (b17 Jun 1909).

The 1929 and 1935 Electoral Register for Beenham shows Frederick's nephew George Gilbert Webb and his wife Mary, living on Beenham Hill with Frederick's sister, Kate and brother, Sydney Webb and his wife, Mary Ann living at The Stocks.