

Raymond Bowler

Rifleman, R/8315, 16th Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps

Raymond Bowler was born in 1894 in Coleshill, Amersham, his birth being registered in the September to December quarter, and baptised on 25 November 1894 at Coleshill. His parents were Reuben and Eliza Margaret Bowler, sometime known as Eliza Ellen and Ellen. Both parents were born in 1869. His father came from a family that had lived in the Chilterns since the beginning of the 18th century. Over the generations his paternal male relatives had been agricultural labourers or chair makers whilst the occupations of female relatives were described as strawplaiter, lace-maker, embroiderer or similar within the local industry.

Raymond's great-grandfather Thomas Bowler was born in Farnham Common in c. 1801 and subsequently lived in Newmans Lane, Farnham Royal, before moving to Seer Green, where Raymond's grandfather Charles was born c. 1844. Charles married a Coleshill girl, Fanny Briant (sic) and like many young couples over the ages, moved into his in-laws' home in Larkins Green, Coleshill. It was there in 1869 that Raymond's father Reuben was born, a grandson for Charles's then 68-year-old in-laws. Reuben, variously a 'carter on a farm' and 'farm labourer' remained in the area and his marriage to Eliza Margaret Nicholas (b.1869 in Coleshill) was registered in the April to June quarter 1892.

Reuben and Eliza Bowler established their own family in Coleshill and, by 1911, Eliza had had 9 children, all born in Coleshill, of which three had died, elder sister Edith, (sometime Edith Margaret), b.1894, d. 1902 and younger brothers Kenneth (sometime Kenny Gordon), b. 1900 d. 1902 and Dennis, sometime Denis, b. 1900, d. 1901. Raymond's eldest sister, Amy (sometime Amy Beatrice), b.1893 had gone into service and was employed as a cook in a boarding house in Brighton whilst he (aged 16) was employed as a 'cowman on farm'. He was thus the older brother in the household to four younger children who were still at school; Edward, b. 1903; Dorothea, b. 1904; Keith, b. 1906 and Mabel, b. 1908. The family lived in Coleshill in a 4-roomed cottage near to the Red Lion public house.

Raymond Bowler enlisted as a Rifleman in Amersham into the 16th Battalion of the King's Royal Rifle Corps. The 16th Btn was a local corps formed in Denham on 19 September 1914 by Field-Marshal Lord Grenfell, Commandant of the Church Lads' Brigade, from current and previous members of that organisation. The Btn moved to Rayleigh in March 1915 but returned to Denham in May. In June 1915 the Btn moved to Clipstone Camp and came under the orders of the 100th Brigade of the 33rd Division. According to Raymond Bowler's Medal Roll Index Card, he qualified for the 1915 Star and the qualifying date was given as 30/7/15, which was the date on which he began his army service. The Btn moved to Perham Down in August 1915 and landed at Le Havre on 17 November 1915.

In 1915 eight service battalions of the King's Royal Rifle Corps joined the war, of which the 16th Btn was one. It was under the command of Lt. Col. L.F.Wyld (Coldstream Guards). The service record of the 16th Btn in France and Flanders can be followed on the excellent web-site of the King's Royal Rifle Corps Association.¹

In 1916 there was a general lack of automatic weapons and ammunition. The 16th Btn saw their first action in the **Battle of High Wood** on 6 July 1916, where they fought well. The action involved a 1000 yard advance over the open area. Exposed flanks prevented complete success and Lt. Col. Wyld was wounded. In the **Battle of Tea Trench** on 24 August, the 16th Btn carried out all objectives, well supported by artillery. In the **Battle of Ancre Heights** on 5 November 1916, the 16th Btn delivered a successful attack on **Hazy Trench**, but lost 167 casualties. All these actions were part of the protracted **Battle of the Somme**.

¹ The King's Royal Rifle Corps Association: www.krrcassociation.com/regimentalhistory.

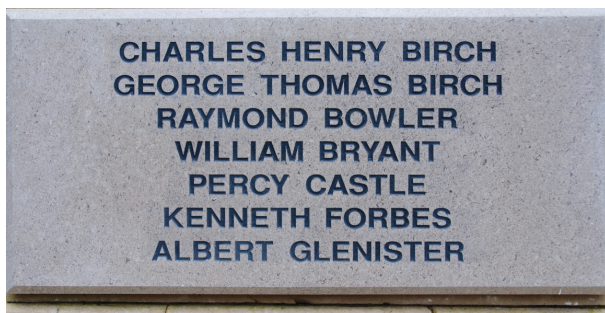
In 1917 the 16th Btn King's Royal Rifles supported the Queen's Regiment in an unsuccessful attack near **Croisilles** on 23 April, with terrible losses. The Battalion was later involved in Flanders in the infamous **Passchendaele battles (Third Battle of Ypres)** from 31 July to 2 December. The 16th Btn was reported as having had a good deal of successful fighting along the Menin Road between 25 and 27 September.

Raymond Bowler was killed in action on 2 December 1917, aged 23, on the last day of the Passchendaele battles.

His body was never found. He was awarded The 1914-15 Star, The British War Medal, 1914-18 and The Allied Victory Medal.

Rifleman Raymond Bowler is remembered with Honour on the Tyne Cot Memorial (panel 115-119), Zonnebeke, West Vlaanderen, Belgium.

He is also remembered on the Roll of Honour in St Mary's Church, Amersham and the Coleshill War Memorial.



Photographs of Coleshill War Memorial
Courtesy: Hazel Garas



Sources:

British Army WW1 Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920 (www.ancestry.co.uk).

Note:

The *Buckinghamshire Examiner* published frequent reports sent from the 16th Btn KRRC.