

## Geoffrey Clarke

### ***Private 51164, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, B Company, Bedfordshire Regiment***

In the early stages of research, there was no indication of the true relationship between Geoffrey and Albert Victor Clarke, although some kind of relationship was suspected. There were several differences shown in their records on *Buckinghamshire Remembers* website, including their places of birth and the names of their fathers. Furthermore there was confusion about the mother's name given in the Wills of the two men as well as the different names given to the cottage in Woodrow where the mothers lived. However, after detailed research into the family background of Albert Victor Clarke, helped by information from his record in the Grenadier Guards, it became clear that Albert Victor and Geoffrey Clarke were brothers.

**Geoffrey Clarke** was born in the April-June quarter of 1899 in East Raynham, in the registration district of Walsingham Norfolk. Conflicting information is given on the "*Soldiers died in the Great War*" list on [ancestry.co.uk](http://ancestry.co.uk), where his place of birth is cited as Amersham. Geoffrey's parents, Edward Clarke (born in New Holkham, Norfolk) and Elizabeth (born in Briston, Norfolk) had eight children. Edward was employed as a gamekeeper. By the time of the 1911 Census of England and Wales the family – Edward (44), Elizabeth (45) with four of their children, namely; Harry (14), Geoffrey (12), Reggie (10) and Dorothy (5) – all born in Norfolk - had moved to a five-roomed house in Harefield Place, Uxbridge Middlesex. Whilst in the Army and only two months before he was killed, Geoffrey made a will showing the family address as 'Keeper's Lodge,' Woodrow, Amersham, Buckinghamshire, part of the Shardeloes estate. He left all his property and effects to his mother, Mrs E. Clarke.<sup>1</sup>

Geoffrey enlisted in Uxbridge, into the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, B Company, Bedfordshire Regiment and saw service in France and Flanders. He was killed on 25 May 1918 aged just 19. Geoffrey's name is recorded on the Amersham Memorial but is also listed on the Penn Street, Buckinghamshire, Memorial as well as the Pozières Memorial, Somme, France.

It is interesting to note, having been born in 1899, that Hollywood actor/director Charles Laughton also served in the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion and, presumably, being the same age, the two young men – Geoffrey and Charles - could have known each other. Charles, as we all know, survived the First World War eventually dying in December 1962. He acted in and directed many memorable films, after the War, in one of his most notable starring as Captain William Bligh in 'Mutiny on the Bounty'.

The 4<sup>th</sup> (Special Reserve) Battalion, sometimes referred to as 'Extra Reserve' was originally formed in 1757. However, at the commencement of the war the battalion was based in Bedford but moved to Felixstowe to provide home defence around Harwich.<sup>2</sup> Following the disaster on the Somme in July 1916 the battalion was mobilised and embarked to the Western Front, landing in France on 25 July 1916. Immediately they were reformed – with other similar battalions – into the 190<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 63<sup>rd</sup> (Royal Naval) Division where the battalion remained until the end of hostilities. The *Brigade War Diary* for May 1918 records that on 20 May they were holding a "support line at Forceville" (Forceville-en-Vimeu) a village near the Somme, Picardy, in France. On 25 May 1918 (the day Geoffrey was killed) the *Diary* states that "6 other ranks (OR's) killed, 11 (OR's) missing". 26 May: "reserve line at Forceville" and 27<sup>th</sup> May: "Corps Commander inspected all ranks that took part in raid at Forceville". It is probably safe to assume that Geoffrey died at or near Forceville.

The Pozières Memorial relates to the period of crisis in March 1918, when the Fifth Army was driven back across the former Somme battlefields and the months that followed the advance to victory, which began on 8 August 1918. The Memorial commemorates over 14,000 casualties of the UK and 300 of South African forces who have no known grave and who died on the Somme between 21 March 1918 and 7 August 1918.

<sup>1</sup> Informal Will of Private Geoffrey Clarke dated 26 March 1918 from [www. Forces –War-Records.co.uk](http://www.Forces-War-Records.co.uk)

<sup>2</sup> The website 'The Long, Long Trail' on the history of The Bedfordshire Regiment

Geoffrey Clarke is remembered with Honour on the  
Pozières Memorial, Somme, France. (ref. Panel 28 and 29).<sup>3</sup>

His name is listed on the War Memorial in Penn Street, located on the common near the pond.

He was, posthumously, awarded The British War Medal, 1914-18 and The Allied Victory Medal. As he was not awarded the 1914-15 Star, Geoffrey must have entered the Western Front theatre of war after the end of 1915. He must have been only 17 when he enlisted.

When Mrs Clarke filled in Form W. 5080 on 15 June 1920 she listed her surviving children as: Charles Clarke (29), Harry Clarke (23), Reggie Clarke (19), Olive Clarke (31, of Clopton Thrapston, Northants.), Alice Clarke (27 of Harefield Road, Uxbridge) and Dorothy Clarke (15). The family address was given as Woodrow Amersham, Bucks.



*The Memorial to Servicemen from Penn Street who lost their lives in the First and Second World Wars is located on the common in Penn Street.*

*Albert Victor Clarke and Geoffrey Clarke were brothers who came originally from Norfolk. The house where they lived in Woodrow was known as: 'Keepers Lodge' or 'Gamekeeper's Cottage'. The building was demolished some time ago and replaced by a more modern dwelling.*

*(Photograph by Hazel Garas 14/4/2014)*

TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN HONOURED  
MEMORY OF THE MEN OF PENN STREET  
WHO FELL IN TWO WORLD WARS  
1914 - 1918  
JOHN DENNISTOUN CAMPBELL BEAVER  
LEONARD CALLOW  
ALBERT VICTOR CLARKE  
GEOFFREY CLARKE  
ARTHUR JAMES COLE  
ARCHIBALD HALLETT

<sup>3</sup> For details of the memorial and engraving , see the chapter on Memorials to the Missing.