

## Guy Godfrey Glyn

**Lieutenant, 109<sup>th</sup> Railway Construction Company, Royal Engineers**



Lieutenant Guy Godfrey Glyn third from left, back row.

**Guy Godfrey Glyn** was born on 4 March 1879 and baptised just over a month later at St John's Church, Hampstead. He was the son of Richard Henry Glyn and Mary Ann Lucking, who had married in 1865.

He was the last child of this couple. He had three older brothers, all born in Hampstead, and one sister whose place of birth, like Guy's, is normally given as Cricklewood or Willesden.

Their father, Richard Henry Glyn, born in Quebec, Canada, as a British subject, was a commission merchant or American merchant, although in the 1911 Census this changed to colonial banker. The family seem to have lived in comfortable circumstances and by 1913 they were at Hill House, Dene Road, Northwood, Middlesex.

Two of Guy's brothers went to Merchant Taylors' School.<sup>1</sup> The eldest, Hugh Douglas, left in 1889, went on to The Queen's College, Oxford, and later became a solicitor. Cecil Richard Frederick entered the school in 1880. He died on 14 May 1906, aged only 30. The second son, Lionel Claude, went to St. Paul's School and Merton College, Oxford; by 1911 he had become a schoolmaster. Guy was at St. Paul's from 1892 to 1896, spending his final year in the Army B class. He spent two years studying engineering at University College, London before embarking on pupillage with two civil engineers, A Buchanan and Charles L Morgan.

Clearly, Guy followed a very different career-path from his brothers and by 1911, aged 32, was a civil engineer working for the London Brighton and South Coast Railway. By 1902 he was Chief Assistant to its Resident Engineer. His obituary<sup>2</sup> notes that he joined the LB&SCR as soon as he had completed his training and worked on the reconstruction of Victoria Station and the electrification of suburban lines. He became an Associate Member of the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) on 6 December 1904.

Demand for the supply of men, munitions, rations and everything else which a vast army required

<sup>1</sup> See photograph on p 132, Croager N E S.

<sup>2</sup> *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers [PICE]*, Vol. 201, p 405.

meant that railways formed a vital part of the war effort. The alternatives, particularly at the beginning of the war, were horse-drawn vehicles, pack-animals, a small number of motor vehicles or, for the troops, marching. Horses and mules had some cross-country capability, although thick mud took a heavy toll of them. Motor vehicles of this date had narrow solid tyres which were totally unsuitable for off-road use and which rapidly broke up all but the best-laid road surfaces. Ambulance trains were used to evacuate the wounded, giving a much smoother ride than road transport and thus increasing badly wounded casualties' chances of survival.

Ideally, supplies went by rail as close to the fighting as possible and then were taken from railhead to roadhead, after which whatever was needed in the front line had to be man-handled through or across the trenches, most of which were about three-feet wide, obstructed by men and equipment, and never dug in straight lines in order to avoid their being swept from end to end by rifle and machine-gun fire and blast. Most of this supply work had to be done at night under the cloak of darkness. Sometimes the locomotive would be uncoupled a mile or two from the railhead and the train pulled and pushed by men the rest of the way, presumably to avoid offering an obvious target.

Although at first the French insisted that any extension or repairs to their rail system should be carried out by them, it soon became apparent that they could not possibly keep up with the demands imposed by war. The National Rail Council was asked to provide engineers and labourers to lay and repair tracks.



Royal Engineers at work relaying a portion of the track near the training camp at Longmoor Hampshire.

Guy Glyn, however, had already volunteered and was commissioned as an officer in the Corps of Royal Engineers on 1 October 1914. He left his employment as engineer's assistant at a salary of £273 per annum on 5 October to report to the Royal Engineers camp at Longmoor, which was off the A3 road between Liss and Liphook, on the Surrey-Hampshire border. This had its own military railway and training could be given, not only in railway construction and maintenance, but in driving, firing and maintaining steam locomotives as each company of engineers needed to be able to operate its own engine. During this time he was photographed with his brother officers at the camp.

Guy was appointed to the 109<sup>th</sup> Railway Construction Company of the Royal Engineers as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. According to the *War Diary*<sup>3</sup> seven officers and 231 men moved out on 24 December 1914 and headed for Southampton on their way to France. They boarded the SS *Benares* which sailed at 6pm, bound for Le Havre, and landed in France on Christmas Day.

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<sup>3</sup> WO 95/4053

By 30 December they were established at Arques-La-Ballastière. Railway construction companies were normally quartered aboard trains, both the company and their equipment being divided into four sections. This meant that, as the need arose, the whole company or detachments of it could quickly be mobilised and moved ready to start work at once wherever they were sent. From the *War Diary* it is apparent that the workshop, bath and latrines would have to be set up or dismantled every time they moved.

Guy features three times during this period in the *War Diary* kept by his commanding officer Captain Forbes Higginson. On 18 January 1915 he was occupied laying out trestles and preparing to drive piles at Sailly, presumably to build a bridge or viaduct there; he returned from this spell of detached duty on 10 February. He must have acquitted himself well, for a week later, with two other officers and 111 NCOs and men, he was sent by rail to Abbeville to build sidings there.

There is no further mention of him and presumably he remained at Abbeville when the rest of the company moved on 11 August to Nieppe. It was probably during this period that he was promoted to lieutenant.

Only a few days later, on August 16<sup>th</sup>, he was killed. He lies buried in the Abbeville Communal Cemetery, in grave no II.C.4.

No obituary has been found which gives full details of how his life ended, but the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway *Register of Staff on Active Service 1914-1920*<sup>4</sup> states that he was killed in a motor-cycle accident. He could well have been on some official errand at the time. The family's announcement in *The Times* of 19 August 1915 confirms that he was "accidentally killed", while on 25 August 1915 the War Office listed him as "died". The War Office telegram sent to his brother Leo on 17 August states that he had been admitted to Number 5 Stationary Hospital, Abbeville, the day before, with concussion of the brain and had died at 2.30pm that same day. Elsewhere in his file<sup>5</sup> a fractured skull is noted as the cause of death. He was 36 years old.

He is commemorated on a war memorial in Holy Trinity Church, Northwood, as well as at the ICE, and there is also a war memorial at London Bridge Station and an entry in the LB&SCR Roll of Honour.

Why does a man who lived in Northwood and worked on a railway south of London figure on the Roll of Honour in St Mary's Church, Amersham? Guy's sister, Edith Grace Glyn, married on 9 June 1903, a clergyman, Charles Edward Briggs. He was the Rector of St Mary's from 1904 to 1946 and led the service of dedication of the war memorial there.

Guy Godfrey Glyn received The Allied Victory Medal, The British War Medal, 1914-18 and The 1914-15 Star.

### Guy Godfrey Glyn is remembered with Honour in the Abbeville Communal Cemetery (Grave II.C.4)



WW1 Memorial  
The Institution of Civil Engineers  
Lt Guy Godfrey Glyn R. E.  
Associate Member

<sup>4</sup> RAIL 414/791 conserved at the National Archives, but now accessible through the website [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)

<sup>5</sup> WO 339/36593 at the National Archives