

***Roland Hazell***  
***Private 7711, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion***  
***Sherwood Foresters (Notts & Derby Regiment)***

**Roland Hazell** was born 1885 in Penn, Buckinghamshire and baptised in Tylers Green on 21 March 1885. (His birth was indexed under Rowland Hazell and registered in Wycombe District in the January-March quarter of 1885. He was known thereafter as Roland.) He was the second son of nine children born to John and Mary Anne Hazell (née Woodbridge). In the 1891 Census, Roland was listed aged 5, his father John was a general labourer and the family lived in Tyler's Green, Penn.



John Hazell ( known as Jack) – Gamekeeper  
Photograph Courtesy: Amersham Museum

At the time of the 1901 Census John Hazell was recorded as gamekeeper on the Tyrwhitt-Drake Estate and living at Cow Pastures, Amersham, with his family. Roland was working as an agricultural labourer. Also living close by at the Pest House, Gore Hill, Amersham was Lily Gomm aged 16 years with her mother Sarah.

On 25 December 1906 Roland and Lily married in Amersham and in 1907 their first son Elgey was born. They subsequently moved to Ilkeston, Derbyshire where another son, Jack, was born in 1909. It is not known what prompted the move, but it is most likely that Roland was an economic migrant looking for a better opportunity. Agricultural wages were low and Ilkeston, near Derby offered higher paid employment in the coalmines.

In the 1911 Census the family was sharing a house with Lily's brother and his family at 42 Eyres Gardens, Ilkeston, Derbyshire. The boys' names were given as Algy and Jack and their sister Dorothy Mary would be born later that year. Roland's occupation was recorded as a collier and he was a reservist with the Sherwood Foresters. He enlisted on 17 October 1914. The attestation papers are hard to read, but he claimed 6 years' service as a Territorial, almost certainly with the

Oxford & Bucks Light Infantry.<sup>1</sup> On 24 March 1915 he arrived in France, joining his regiment's 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion which formed part of the 18th Brigade of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division. The battalion had just taken part in the major **battle at Neuve Chapelle** (10-13 March)), suffering severe casualties, and it is likely that Roland Hazell arrived as part of the much-needed reinforcements.

In April the battalion was near Armentières, moving in and out of the line at **Houplines** and **Le Bizet**. On 28 April 1915 they moved just across the Belgian border to Le Bizet, setting up machine gun posts and manning the breastworks. The *War Diary* records that the following day 'B' and 'C' Companies were shelled heavily in their billets, 8 NCOs and men being wounded, of whom 2 subsequently died.<sup>2</sup>

One of these must have been Roland Hazell, killed in action on 29 April 1915, only 5 weeks after his arrival, having served a total of 195 days in the army. He was aged 30. According to the Casualty Form (Army form B 103), Pte R. Hazell was injured by a shell wound to the chest on 29 April, was attended to by the 18<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance Unit but died of his wounds on the same day.

As reported in the *Bucks Examiner*, a letter he had written to his sister was found on his person. Lieutenant R Palmer, Roland's Commanding Officer, forwarded the letter to his sister and informed her that *'Roland was killed by shell fire whilst gallantly attempting to save a child who had been left in the upper storey of a house which was under heavy shell fire.'*

Roland was commended for his bravery. Ironically his heroic attempt to save a child's life meant that his own three were left fatherless, as was another daughter born later that year.

Roland Hazell wrote an informal Will on arrival in France, dated 24 March 1915, in which he stated *"I give the whole of my property effects to my wife Mrs R. Hazell, 12 Grass St. Ilkeston."* Roland's effects were sent to Lily Hazell from the Infantry Records in Lichfield on 27 September 1915 and Lily acknowledged them. She was obviously disappointed and replied the following: *"Dear Sir, Thank you for forwarding my late husband's letters which I duly received. As for more articles which I should have prized, should have been on him. But no doubt have got mislaid. L. Hazell."* (sic). It was later, on 8 November 1915 that Lily Hazell was advised that a pension of 22/6 per week would be paid for her and her four children from 15 November 1915.

Roland Hazell was originally buried in the grounds of the Assumptionist Convent of Le Bizet, near Ploegsteert and his posthumous child was named Lillie Le Bizet Hazell. After the Armistice the 89 bodies interred at Le Bizet were moved to the Strand Military Cemetery at Hainaut, Belgium.

The children's misfortunes were not at an end, for their mother died, aged only 36, in the third quarter of 1919. It was their grandmother Sarah Gomm, now the wife of William Farmer, and living at 14 Lower Middleton Street, Ilkeston, who signed the receipt for Roland's three medals on 11 March 1922 as the guardian of his children. Roland was awarded The 1914-15 Star, The Allied Victory Medal and The British War Medal, 1914-18.

Roland Hazell is remembered with Honour and buried in  
Strand Military Cemetery, Hainaut, Belgium (Grave ref. X.L.6)

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Hazell's Army World War 1 Service Documents, The National Archives ref WO363 (known as the 'Burnt Documents' because they survived a fire in 1940) are wrongly indexed in Ancestry.co.uk under Robert Hazell. They are mostly illegible, but a few facts can be discerned.

<sup>2</sup> *War Diary* of the Sherwood Forester Regiment The National Archives ref WO95/1616/3



Apart from being commemorated on the Amersham War Memorial, Roland Hazell is listed on the Memorial at Mapperley Collieries, Derbyshire. (Photograph and other information courtesy of Derbyshire Family History Society)