

James Anthony Horne
2nd Lieutenant, 16th Battalion
London Regiment (Queen's Westminster Rifles)

James Anthony Horne was born on 3 August 1892 and was baptised on 1 September that year in the Parish Church of St. James, Islington. The ceremony was performed by James's father the Reverend Joseph White Horne, Vicar of St. James at that time. The family address is given as St. James Vicarage, Islington.

In 1901 Joseph became Vicar at St. Mary Magdalene, Monkton, Kent, and the family, by this time including three children, took up residence in the Vicarage there. The Census of that year shows a nurse (domestic), a cook and two housemaids also resident at the Vicarage so the family obviously had plenty of help and lived in some comfort. Their stay in Monkton was fairly short however, and by 1905 they were living at Ivy House, High Street, Highgate, North London, where they were to remain until the outbreak of the war. They moved once more to reside briefly at Chesham Bois, Buckinghamshire, with Joseph by that time being retired, but returned to London, firstly to Highgate and subsequently to Kensington where he was to live out the remainder of his life.

James received his secondary school education at Highgate School which he entered in September 1904. He left in July 1910 having been awarded a Choral Exhibition to Christ's College, Cambridge. He studied there for four years gaining honours in both parts of the Theological Tripos and being awarded his B.A. Degree. As one would expect, he had a fine voice and he regularly performed as a member of a vocal quartet. He was an active member of the Musical Society and served on their committee. Both his father and his uncle were alumni of the University of Cambridge.



Christ's College Cambridge Matriculation 1910 – James Anthony Horne seated 3rd from right.
By kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Christ's College Cambridge.

James came down from Cambridge, probably about the very time that war was declared, and he enlisted almost immediately as Private No. 2535 in the 2/28th Battalion London Regiment (Artists Rifles). Enrolment had started on 31 August 1914 and records show that "within a week 5,000

would-be recruits had applied for admission". James's service number confirms that he joined in mid-September that year.

Originally established in London in 1860 as the 38th Middlesex (Artists) Rifle Volunteer Corps, its members then included painters, musicians, actors, architects and others engaged in creative endeavours. Although essentially a regiment of the British Territorial Army, it saw action in South Africa during the Boer War of 1900-1901. In 1914 it was particularly attracting public school and university men and men from the professions, some of whom may have already had some military training in their schools' and colleges' Officer Training Corps. An "experiment" in which fifty "other ranks" were promoted to Second Lieutenant after only a brief lecture or two and sent straight into action, proved so successful that it set the course that the Regiment was to follow from that point on. The 1st Battalion was transformed into an Officers' Training Corps operating at St. Omer, France, until the summer of 1917 after which all future candidates for Commissions returned to England for training. The 2nd Battalion, undergoing training in England, provided drafts to the 1st Battalion and also furnished officers for the New Armies and some Territorial Units. Eventually, it became so depleted that it was absorbed into the 1st Battalion.

"Such was the diversity and competence of its members that the Artists Rifles was able to provide expertise from within its own ranks as the occasion demanded. A squad of seven electrical engineers was sent to St. Omer to sort out a problem there, followed later on by a team of twenty chartered accountants presumably to assist with accounting at GHQ. Interpreters were required to assist with the imported Chinese labour employed on the Western Front and three qualified men were immediately made available. Landscape sketching, now used to indicate enemy positions and targets, would have already been among the accomplishments of many of the men."

James Anthony Horne received his Commission in February 1915. Little is known of him until later that year when he arrived in Ypres to join the 1/16th Battalion London Regiment (Queen's Westminster Rifles).

The city of Ypres in western Belgium is strategically situated in its proximity to both Belgian and French coastal ports. It is an ancient city, long fortified to keep out invaders such as the Romans who raided it in the first century BC. In 1914 it had a population of some 18,000 mostly living in and around the city.

On 7 October 1914, a division of The Imperial German Cavalry had arrived in Ypres where they remained for two days. Having rested and eaten, requisitioned fodder for their horses and made payment with German Marks and pre-printed promissory notes, they left. However, this was not before they had emptied the city's coffers of thousands of francs.

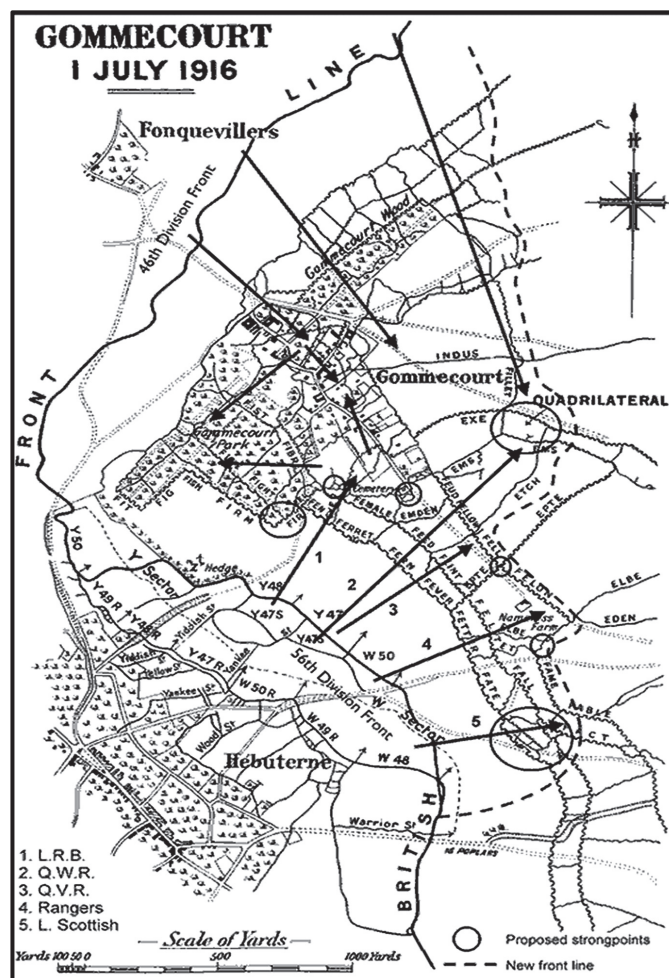
A week later, British soldiers of the IV Corps commanded by General Rawlinson arrived in Ypres making contact with French troops who were already there. A defensive line to the east of the city was established, the aim being to block the route for the German Army through Ypres to the French and Belgian coastal ports. There were several major battles fought to hold or win possession of this ancient city, but the British Army were to remain in Ypres, or "Wipers" as it was affectionately called by the British, until the end of the war in November 1918.

The 1/16th Battalion *War Diary* entry for 21 November 1915 records that: "Lieutenant Corlett and 2nd Lieutenant Horne joined from England". At that time the Battalion was billeted in Houtkerk just to the east of Ypres. The whole of the 18th Infantry Brigade had been moved there, out of the range of the guns, for three weeks' real rest.

By 9 December, the Battalion had moved forward again to the Potijze section of the front where it held the trenches continuously until February 1916. Whilst there, it had its first serious experience of a gas attack by the enemy although its effects proved insignificant, the men being protected by their gas masks. The *War Diary* entry for 3 January 1916 records an attempt by 2nd Lieutenant Horne

with Riflemen May and Roper to enter "The Mound", a landmark close against the German lines that had been observed to be an area of constant activity by the enemy. On that occasion, it was found to be occupied and they also saw men in a trench or ditch nearby. By 6 February the Battalion had been removed from the front line altogether and concentrated at Poperinghe in preparation for its transfer from the 6th to the 56th (London) Division, then in process of formation. During the eight months spent in the Ypres Salient the Battalion lost almost 1,100 officers and other ranks.

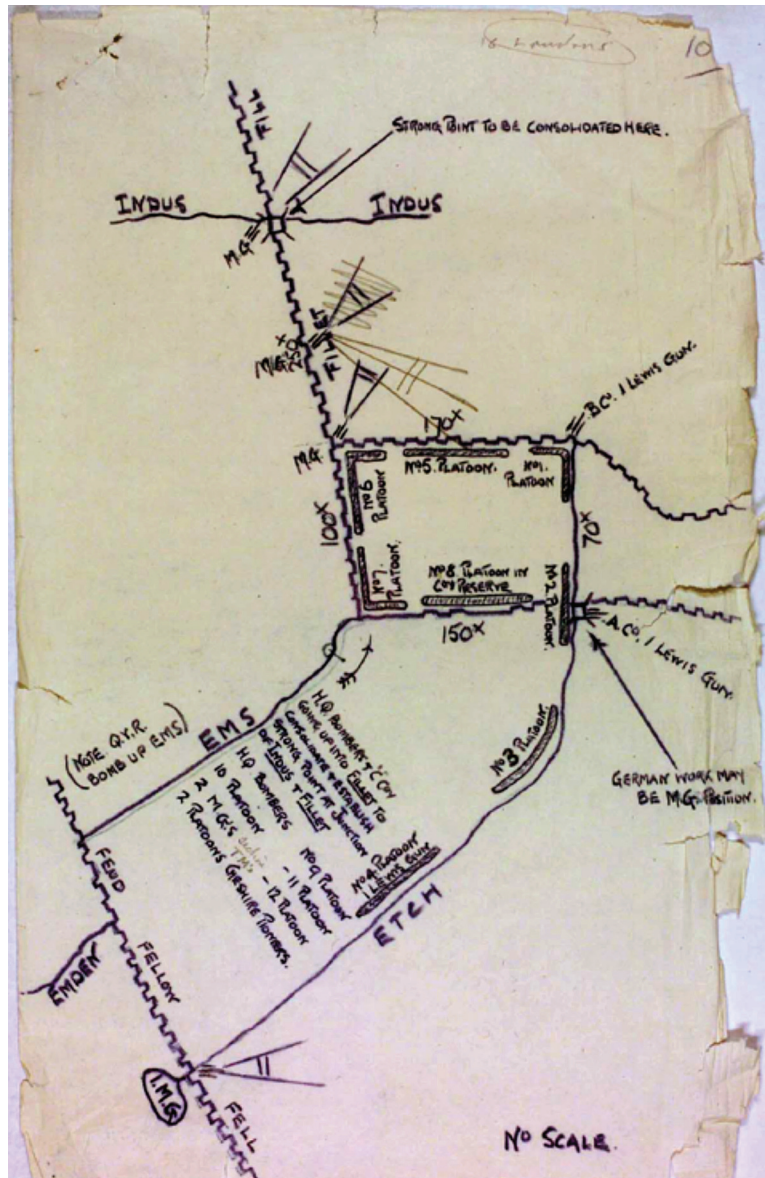
The formation of the 56th Division and its subsequent training over the coming months at camps to the south-west of Abbeville was in preparation for a major offensive at the Somme. By early May 1916, the 56th Division had taken over the line to the west and south of **Gommecourt**. Working for three nights, 3,000 men of the Division had advanced the line 400 yards, digging almost three miles of new trenches with little interference from the enemy. Three working parties of the Queen's Westminsters, each one hundred strong, dug a further trench protected by wire, advancing the front by a further 100 yards. These trenches were to be the assembly point for the Battalion for its attack on Gommecourt and from where they were to advance on 1 July.



The Plan for the Attack on Gommecourt. Kind permission:
Bill MacCormick (*Pro Patria Mori* by Alan Macdonald).

The artillery had been pounding the enemy lines, almost without pause, for seven days before the attack and a final intense bombardment began early in the morning of the advance, followed by a smoke screen generated along the whole front. The Battalion's advance across no-man's-land was accomplished with comparatively small loss but, when the enemy lines were reached, it was found that much of the wire was still intact, impeding further progress. The enemy artillery then put down a heavy barrage on the advancing troops and Battalion losses mounted rapidly. Those who managed to get through were pinned down against a bank on "Nameless Farm Road" and it was impossible to make any advance from there.

2nd Lieutenant J A Horne of B Company was the senior officer remaining by the time that the Battalion was fighting in Nameless Farm Road. He, along with the remaining officers of A and C Companies, gathered their men together and dropped into Etch communication trench where the road crossed it. Working forward towards the third German line, two of the officers entered Fellow trench to the left and, while attempting to "bomb" their way along it, were both killed only a few yards into it. Other parties managed to press forward towards the cemetery, "blocking" trenches as they went, but they encountered stiff resistance as they tried to progress. 2nd Lieutenant Horne had mounted a Lewis gun and he, together with a single survivor of the gun team, provided covering fire for them. Fierce fighting continued for some time in the face of heavy enemy counter-attacks and by 12.30 p.m, with their ammunition exhausted and no hope of any further supplies or of reinforcements, 2nd Lieutenant Horne decided to withdraw his men to the second German line. He remained behind with the Lewis gun covering their withdrawal and continued to work the gun alone after the remaining member of the team had been killed or wounded. When the ammunition was exhausted, he used any available grenades and finally resorted to holding off the enemy with his revolver until he was killed at his post.



Plan of Attack 1st July 1916 (War Diary WO 95/2963)
1/16th Battalion, London Regiment (Queen's Westminster Rifles)

James Anthony Horne received the decorations awarded to all men who served during the Great War¹ and there is no record of any special recognition of this particular act of bravery other than the report of his commanding officer:

"Owing to there being no Officer returned from the other side many meritorious acts cannot for the present at any rate be brought to notice, neither those done by men killed and wounded, nor by those who came through it, but I desire to particularly bring to notice the most gallant conduct and bearing of 2nd Lieut. J. A. HORNE who by his example and leading inspired and helped all who came within his reach. I have every reason to fully believe that his gallantry and leading merit a recommendation for the Victoria Cross. All who are returned speak in glowing terms of his most gallant conduct. I deeply regret to fear that there is practically no chance of he having survived as he was seen to be wounded very severely".

R Shoolbred Lieut-Colonel

Commanding 1/16th Battalion London Regiment

¹ James Anthony Horne was awarded The British War Medal, 1914-18, The Allied Victory Medal and The 1914-15 Star.

He was a young man of much promise as reflected in his Obituary in the Christ's College Magazine 1916-17:

"Horne was a man of singular charm, a delightful companion and a most affectionate friend. He had a wide circle of friends in the University and joined to the keenness with which he pursued his favourite study of Christian doctrine a great interest in the affairs of art and music and a love of choice books. His collection of theological and philosophical books, a very remarkable one to have been made by so young a man, has been given by his parents to the College Library. He was by no means a 'born fighter' but all the more admirable were the courage and calm resolution with which he faced the duty laid upon him by the war. His death is an irreparable loss to his many friends".

His name is inscribed on the richly carved memorial at Christ's along with those of the many other men of the College who gave their lives during The Great War.

James Anthony Horne is remembered with Honour at
Gommecourt British Cemetery No. 2, Hébuterne, Sp. Mem. C.5

A memorial stone there bears the inscription:

"BELIEVED TO BE BURIED
IN THIS CEMETERY
SECOND LIEUTENANT
J. A. HORNE
QUEEN'S WESTMINSTERS
1ST JULY 1916 AGE 23"

Probably in about 1914, the Horne family had come to live in Chesham Bois, Bucks, (at Greenbank House, Bois Common) and that was their home at the time that James was killed in action. It is not clear what exactly brought them to the area and, by early in 1919, they had returned to live once again in Highgate. During their time in Chesham Bois, they had attended St Leonard's Church and Reverend Joseph White Horne may have officiated there from time to time. Their son's name appears on the Memorial Plaque within the Church and also on the Parish War Memorials both in Chesham Bois and Amersham.



"Gen. Snow, Commanding the Corps, thanked us for the work done at GOMMECOURT. He proceeded to spoil the whole thing by adding: Of course your battalion did not succeed in taking Gommecourt but as a matter of fact that doesn't matter a damn; I never expected you would. You succeeded in taking the enemy's attention off what was happening down South, and that is all I care about".

"From our (The Westminsters') point of view we had lost 360 men and 19 officers and all to no avail. Doesn't matter a damn when we had lost all our friends".

2nd Lieutenant C E Moy, 1/16th Battalion, London Regiment (Queen's Westminster Rifles)

Sources:

I am indebted to the Master and Fellows of Christ's College, University of Cambridge, for permission to use the 1910 Matriculation Photograph that includes James Horne and also to quote from his obituary in the *Christ's College Magazine* 1916-17. My special thanks to Amelie Roper and Charlotte Byrne of Christ's College Library for locating the material and making it available to me.

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16th Battalion, London Regiment (Queen's Westminster Rifles) War Diary WO 95/1616

16th Battalion, London Regiment (Queen's Westminster Rifles) War Diary WO 95/2963

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