

William Lawrence

Private 8340, 2nd Battalion

Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry

William Lawrence, was born in Coleshill during the period January to March, 1885. He was the son of Henry and Sarah Lawrence. Henry Lawrence had married Sarah Eden in the Amersham district in the period April to June of 1880 and in the 1881 Census, the young couple were listed as living in Larkins Green, Coleshill. Henry was an agricultural labourer and Sarah was a bead worker.

Ten years later, the 1891 Census revealed that Sarah and Henry had moved to live with Sarah's widowed father William Eden, in The Platt, Amersham. William was a gardener and must have worked for the Shardeloes estate. Henry and Sarah had four children by 1891: James (7) William (6) Daisy (2) and Kate (six months). All except Kate had been born in Coleshill. Henry Lawrence died in 1899, aged 44.

According to the 1901 Census, William (aged 16) was living with his mother, Sarah (45), and his grandfather, William Eden, aged 78, a Shardeloes estate pensioner, still at The Platt, Amersham. Widowed Sarah had taken on work as a charwoman. William's occupation was listed as a gardener (domestic), whilst his brother James was working as a road labourer. Two further sisters were listed: Annie (aged 6) and Florence (5).

By the time of the 1911 Census, William Lawrence (26) was a boarder in an eight-roomed house in Norwoods Yard, Broadway, Amersham. He was single and employed as a bricklayer's labourer. The boarding house was run by a widow, Emma Newns, and there were four other boarders, mostly labourers, of varying ages. Sarah Lawrence could not be found on the 1911 Census, but the *Buckinghamshire Remembers website* gives William's residence at death as Chesham.

William enlisted in the 3rd Reserve Battalion of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (OBLI) in Oxford. The date of enlistment is not known, but as he qualified for the 1914 Star Medal, he must have enlisted prior to, or early in the war. This Battalion, together with the 2nd Battalion, left for France and Flanders on 28 August 1914.

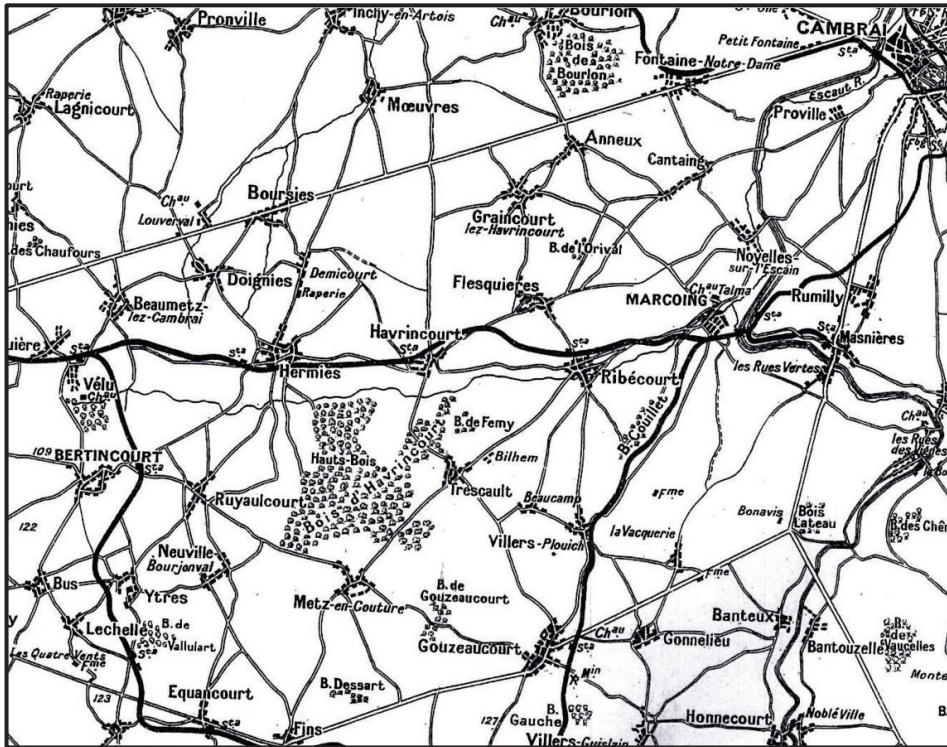
William was transferred several times. He first went to C Company of the 5th Battalion on 2 July 1915 and was attached to the Tunnelling Company on 24 November 1915; he was then transferred on 21 March 1916 as Private No. 206186 to the 279th Company, Royal Engineers, and finally as Private No. 8340 to the 6th Battalion OBLI. William was a gardener or bricklayer's labourer before enlisting, but neither job would have qualified him for tunnelling, which required considerable expertise. The 6th (Service) Battalion was disbanded in France on 15 February 1918 with troops going to the 2/4th and 5th Battalions and the 14th Entrenching Battalion.

By following the *War Diaries* of the 2nd Battalion OBLI¹ it is possible to piece together the last movements of William Lawrence. The *Diary* author writes that the 2nd Battalion entered billets at Metz-en-Couture at the end of January 1918 and worked on new transport lines, defences and R.E. dumps, with occasional six-day tours in the trenches.

Reinforcements arrived, in the form of soldiers from the 6th Battalion (Service) consisting of 8 sergeants and 129 rank and file (including Private William Lawrence), plus officers. The author noted, rather cheekily, that there were a number of 'elderly men and senior NCOs in the transfer'. William was 33!

¹ *The Chronicle of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry 1918* Eyre and Spottiswoode Ltd. The Record of the 2nd Battalion pp 100-102.

The Divisional Front was reorganized and the Regiment withdrew from the trenches to billets and when these were shelled they moved to a camp erected on either side of the Metz-Equancourt cross-country track. In mid February the Regiment relieved the Royal Fusiliers in what became known as the **Vacqu rie Centre Sub-section** of the 2nd Divisional Front and took over the trenches. The 2nd Btn then set about improving and relabelling those which did not agree with official maps. The Regiment was relieved on 27 February 1918 and withdrew to billets and shelters in Metz-en-Couture.



The Map (from the Chronicle of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry) shows the location of Metz-en-Couture, which lies about nine miles south-west of Cambrai and about five miles from Marcoing.

The *War Diary* entry for 28 February states that the ribbon of the "1914 Star" was received and issued on parade by the Commanding Officer to 70 of all ranks. (This included Private William Lawrence).

The *Diaries* never make it clear how close the 2nd Btn billeted in Metz-en-Couture was to the front. The entry in the *Diary* for 1 March 1918, states the following:

"A party of 3 officers and 29 other ranks proceeded on 4 days' leave to Paris – a very refreshing experience for troops situated in such a desolate area as this.

At 6.30 pm there was a practice occupation of the second system of defence on the Brigade front. Casualties (from shelling): 5 killed and 7 wounded."

One of the casualties was Private William Lawrence who died aged 33 on 1 March 1918. He was awarded The British War Medal, 1914-18, The Allied Victory Medal and The 1914 Star.

William Lawrence is remembered with Honour in the
Metz-en-Couture Communal Cemetery British Extension, Pas de Calais.
(grave ref. II.H.34)



William Lawrence is also remembered on the War Memorial in Amersham Methodist Church.