

James Emmens Mead

***Private 19737, 6th (Service) Battalion, Dorsetshire Regiment
Formerly 28860, Gloucestershire Regiment***

At the time of the 1911 Census for England & Wales, **James Emmens Mead** (31), a retail grocer, was living in a five-room home at High Street, Amersham, Buckinghamshire, with his wife of three years Edith Mead (née Slade) who, at 21, was ten years his junior. They had one son John Edward Mead (8 months) who had been born in Amersham, as indeed, had his father James (baptised 7 April 1880 at St Mary's). Edith was born in Coleshill, Buckinghamshire. In the Census of 1901 it is interesting to note that James Emmens's father, also a James Emmens Mead (51), was living at High Street, Amersham (grocer's shop), with his occupation listed as grocer-shopkeeper. His wife Lydia Mead (58) plus their son James (our subject soldier) at 21 years old and employed as a grocer's assistant, were also recorded at the same address. Intriguingly there was no mention of the parents in 1911, when the son was now both head of the family and a retail grocer. Investigation showed that the father died on 2 January 1904, leaving £467 13 shillings and eleven pence, and that the mother, Lydia, died in 1906. The parents may have anticipated that their only child, heir to an established business, was well set up for a life that would differ little from those of his forebears.



J E Mead Grocer's Shop, High Street, Amersham, about 1900
Photograph courtesy: Amersham Museum

Back in time still further, to the 1861 Census in fact, James Emmens' grandparents were John and Martha Mead (née Bolton) living at High Street, Amersham. The dwelling was listed as the Swan Inn, presumably the same location today – March 2014 – with John being the Innkeeper. A nation of shopkeepers, as it has been said, with the odd Innkeeper in the mix too! Unfortunately an address of just High Street, Amersham in several Census records is not precise enough in terms of actual location and the additional information of 'grocer's shop' appended once to the address is also unhelpful in this respect. An interesting supposition; John and Martha Mead's parents and James Emmens Mead's great grandparents were Thomas Mead and Sarah Emmens, and thus the Emmens maternal surname was, perhaps, the catalyst for the somewhat unusual Christian or given name subsequently bestowed upon both James and his father. In fact the marriage of Thomas Mead and Sarah Emmens took place in Rickmansworth on 19 July 1810. Also of note, resulting from the Census of 1881, is the population of Amersham being 2500 which included 6 officers and

156 inmates as residents of the local workhouse.¹ Reference to a James Mead (James Emmens's father) appears in Kelly's 1891 *Directory* as a grocer and seedsman of High Street, Amersham and the son's last appearance, as grocer, in the same publication was in 1915.



Plaque on the organ at Chalfont St Giles Church
Photograph: Peter Underwood – *Buckinghamshire Remembers*

Attestation or enlistment into the British Army for James Emmens Mead was in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, but as his Service Record is not available (probably amongst those records destroyed by an incendiary bomb during the Second World War), the date of enlistment is unknown.

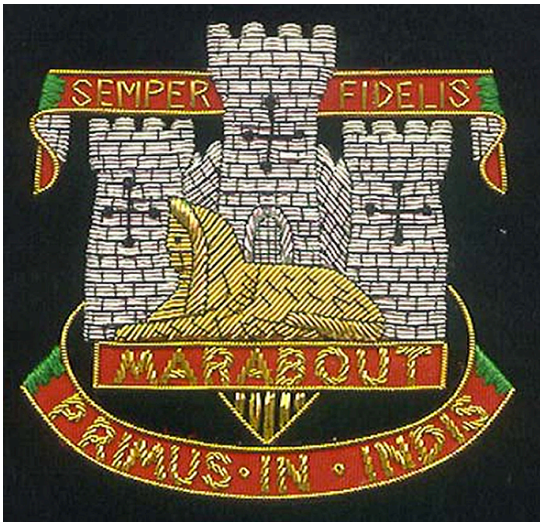
It seems highly probable that at his age, and married, he was conscripted into the army. However, we do know that he was placed initially in the Gloucestershire Regiment as Private 28860 and that he later served in the Dorsetshire Regiment in the Western European Theatre of War and saw action in France. He was killed in action on the 11th October 1918 – just a month prior to the Armistice and cessation of hostilities on the 11 November. The 6th (Service) Battalion of the Dorsetshire Regiment was raised in Dorchester on 6 September 1914² as part of Kitchener's Second Army (K2). When expansion of the army was sanctioned in August 1914, it required four armies each of six Divisions having two Field Companies each, that is; 48 new Field Companies.

The newly formed battalion moved to Wareham in Dorset and was initially attached as Army Troops to 17th (Northern) Division. The following March 1915 the 6th transferred to the 50th Brigade but still formed part of the 17th (Northern) Division which, in May 1915, moved to Romsey in Hampshire. Very soon afterwards it was posted overseas, landing in Boulogne, France on 14 July 1915. James, however, cannot have served overseas before 31 Dec 1915 as he was not entitled to The 1914-15 Star.

The 6th Battalion of the Dorsets (as they were known) were part of the 17th (Northern) Division, which in turn was part of the Third Army, led by General Byng. They were involved in the **Battles of the Hindenberg Line** and Associated battles, when the Germans retreated to a pre-determined position. They fought in the **Battle of Havrincourt** (12 September 1918), the **Battle of Epehy** (18 September), the **Battle of Cambrai** (8-9 October 1918) and the subsequent **pursuit to the Selle** (9–12 October 1918). This was the action in which Private James Emmens Mead lost his life, aged 38.

¹ Kelly's *Directory* of 1887 for Buckinghamshire, page 311

² The Long, Long Trail (the British Army in 1914-18) website



The Badge of the Dorsetshire Regiment

Following his demise his widow Edith was granted administration of his Will in London on 9 April 1920. Her address is given as The Bottle Cottages, Coleshill, Buckinghamshire, at that time, and the estate amounted to £242 19 shillings and seven pence. She ultimately married again twice: first a Frederick G Gutteridge, but Fred unfortunately died in 1923 (no children), and later that year followed a third marriage to a William Henry Carter which would produce three children in addition to Edith's first born son John Edward Mead (who died in 1969) from her original marriage to James Emmens Mead. Edith's last known address was 16 Abingdon Villas, Kensington.

James was awarded The Allied Victory Medal and British War Medal, 1914-18 and is commemorated on the Roll of Honour in St Mary's Church, Amersham.

James Emmens Mead is remembered with Honour
Montay-Neuvilly Road Cemetery, Montay, Nord, France
Grave Reference I.F.7.



Montay is a village on the Northern outskirts of Le Cateau. The cemetery was made by the 23rd Royal Garrison Artillery on the 26-27 October 1918. Originally there were 111 graves, mainly of men of the 33rd and 38th Divisions and those of the 6th Dorsetshires. After Armistice Day bodies were moved from the battlefields and grouped in larger cemeteries. It is likely that JE Mead's body was one of those brought from the River Cemetery at Neuvilly on the banks of the River Selle. It had been made by Mead's own Battalion and contained the graves of 18 of their men who lost their lives on 11 October 1918.