

Ernest William Olney
Private G/24630, 7th Battalion
Queen's Own (Royal West Kent Regiment)

Ernest William Olney was born on 11 April 1882 in Amersham. His parents were Charles and Elizabeth Olney. In the 1881 Census they were living at Beel House Lodge, Amersham Common, where Charles was a gardener and there was an unnamed daughter aged one month. Beel House was a prosperous farm built up by exploiting the wood and pasture of Amersham Common. Ernest was baptised in Chesham Bois on 4 June 1882. In the 1891 Census the family was still at Beel House Lodge. Charles was listed as a gardener and domestic servant. The daughter had been named Grace and a second daughter, Ida, was aged three.



Beel House Lodge (Photo: Anne Peters)

In the 1901 Census 18-year old Ernest William Olney was away from home working as a servant in Amersham, but by time of the 1911 Census he had returned to Beel House as a gardener. His address was listed as Beel House, Stable Bothy Gard [sic]. His parents and sister, Ida, had moved to Moreton-in-the-Marsh, Gloucestershire.

On 11 June 1916 Alice Maud Mitchell applied for a marriage licence for the solemnization of matrimony in the parish church of St. Luke's, Chelsea, between herself and William Ernest Olney, a bachelor aged 33, of Amersham, Buckinghamshire. It looks as if William was the name he used, but the marriage certificate gives his name as Ernest William, the same as his birth certificate. The marriage took place on 4 July 1916. The bridegroom's age is now given as 34 and Alice's as 30, so perhaps she hadn't been too sure of the facts about her husband-to-be when she applied for the licence. His profession on the marriage certificate was listed as soldier. Records indicate that he enlisted in Aylesbury, but the date is unknown. She probably applied for the licence so that they could marry before he left to fight or while he was on leave.

Page 221

1916. Marriage solemnized at <u>the Parish Church</u> in the Parish								
of <u>St Luke Chelsea</u> in the County of <u>London</u>								
Obanns No.	1 When Married.	2 Name and Surname.	3 Age.	4 Condition.	5 Rank or Profession.	6 Residence at the time of Marriage.	7 Father's Name and Surname.	8 Rank or Profession of Father.
441	July 24 1916	Ernest William Olney	34	Bachelor	Soldier	Parish of Amersham Buckinghamshire	Charles Olney	Head Gardener
		Alice Maude Mitchell	30	Spinster	—	Parish of St Luke Chelsea	John George Mitchell	Clothier & Tailor
Married in the <u>Parish Church</u> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <u>Established Church</u> by <u>Licence</u> or <u>otherwise</u> by me,								
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		<u>Ernest William Olney</u> <u>Alice Maude Mitchell</u>		in the Presence of us, <u>Angie Brown</u> <u>Ed. Vancuren</u>		<u>Paul Peters</u> <u>Pastor</u>		

Ernest William Olney was initially a private in the Somerset Light Infantry, no. 23225. He then moved to the 7th Battalion, Queen's Own (Royal West Kent Regiment) as Private G/24630. This Battalion was formed at Maidstone on 5 Sept 1914 as part of Kitchener's Second Army and came under the command of the 55th Brigade in the 18th (Eastern) Division. It moved to Colchester in April 1915 and on to Salisbury Plain in May. On 27 July 1915 they landed at Le Havre.

In February 1917 the 7th Battalion had enjoyed more than two months respite after its long spell of fighting on the heights above **Ancre**. At the end of November 1916 they had arrived in the neighbourhood of Abbeville and did not return to the line until February 1917. During January 1917, extensive training was carried out at Hedauville, about 3 miles north-west of Albert. The soldiers in the large draft which joined that month were impressed with the smartness of the Battalion. One wrote home in awe of the standard required, commenting "As for guard mounting, I guess it would beat the Guard changing at Whitehall easily". During this period there were many changes among the officers.

The 7th Battalion returned to the front line on 12 February 1917, relieving the 12th Middlesex Regiment and found itself holding part of Desire Trench, but somewhat to the left of the line which it had attacked on November 18th. Part of the Grandcourt Trench was in British control, but the eastern part was still held by the Germans. An attack was launched by the British in the early hours of 14 February. Initially it appeared to have gone well, although Captain Ford was wounded and two 2nd Lieutenants were killed. However, when a platoon led by Captain Matthews went to investigate, it appeared that the whole objective had not been taken. In the darkness direction had been lost, the attackers had got into the left of their objective, and the righthand platoon had run into uncut wire in front of the strongpoint, and had been shot down almost to a man. The attack, therefore, resulted in very limited success and casualties were deplorably heavy. Captain Ford died of his wounds and Captain Matthews was killed in organizing the defence of the portion taken. The 7th Battalion was resting when the 53rd and 54th Brigades made a successful attack on the high ground overlooking Miraumont on 17 February.

The 7th's next tour in the front line was February 19–23. Its patrols found that the enemy were beginning to retire from the pronounced salient, which its positions on the Ancre now presented. It was during this enterprise that Private Olney was killed in action on 23 February 1917.

Ernest William Olney's medal rolls index-card shows that Alice applied for her husband's Allied Victory Medal and British War Medal, 1914–18 on 26 October 1920. Her address then was the Alexandra Nursing Home, Stoke Devonport.

Ernest William Olney is remembered with Honour and lies buried in Regina Trench Cemetery, Grandcourt, grave reference VII.D.9.



Regina Trench Cemetery, Grandcourt
Courtesy: Commonwealth War Graves Commission

This cemetery now contains 2,279 burials and commemorations of the First World War. It seems likely that Alice never saw her husband again after their marriage in the summer of 1916.

Sources:

Watt Family Tree (Ancestry)

UK Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919 (Ancestry)

Atkinson, C T, *The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment 1914-19*, London, 1924

Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment Museum

Hunt, Julian, *A History of Amersham*, Chichester, 2001

War Diaries of the 7th Btn Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, The National Archives, Kew, ref WO95/2049(2)