

George Stephenson Podbury
Private 17154, 6th (Service) Battalion
Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry



Photo: *Buckinghamshire Examiner*

George Stephenson Podbury was born on 5 May 1890 at Bury End, Amersham. His parents were Henry Podbury, a carpenter, and his wife, Deborah (née Ridgers). The couple married at St. Anne's, Bagshot, in 1880. Henry, known as Harry, was working as a carpenter on the railway, and the couple moved around in the early years of their marriage before coming to Amersham in 1888 when the railway was extended to Aylesbury. Harry was a lifelong abstainer and non-smoker, who was "beloved by all and had not an enemy in the world", according to his obituary in the *Bucks Examiner* in 1933. His love of the railways was undoubtedly the reason for his son's name.

George was the fourth of their ten children. His sister, Annie, and two brothers, William and Ernest were his elder siblings. Annie was born in East Grinstead, Ernest in Lymington, Hants., and William in Whitchurch, Hants. Six other children were born to Henry and Deborah, namely Ellen, Edward, Emily, Albert, Arthur and Ethel. The family lived at 3, New Cottages, Bury End, Amersham. George was baptised in Amersham on 22 June 1890 and educated at St. Mary's School, Amersham. By the time of the 1901 Census his father was recorded as a carpenter and dairyman.

On 29 March 1913 George Podbury, a labourer, sailed from Liverpool on the White Star Dominion Canadian Service steamship *Arabic*, bound for Maine, USA. George's destination was Halifax, Canada, although his family believe that he ultimately intended going to Toronto. Little would he have known that the following year he would be returning home to fight for his country. On 29 November 1914 he returned to London from Montreal, Quebec, Canada, on board the *Sicilian*.

George enlisted with the county regiment, the Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, in January 1915 and joined the 6th (Service) Battalion. This battalion was formed in Oxford in September 1914 as part of Kitchener's Second Army and placed under the orders of the 60th Brigade in the 20th (Light) Division. Training was carried out at various places in the Aldershot area until April 1915, and then on Salisbury Plain. On 22 July 1915 the Battalion landed at Boulogne. Pte Podbury was to serve in France for fourteen months. Training in trench warfare was carried out near Laventie. On 25 September 1915 the Battalion took part in an operation subsidiary to the Battle of Loos. In January 1916 it moved to the Ypres Salient and was in the line next to the Canadian Division during the German attack in June. In July it moved to the Fleurbaix area to assist in an operation by the Australian Division.

In early August 1916 the battalion moved to Courcelles, where it remained for a week, training and providing working parties. A move was then made to Ville-sous-Corbie, which was reached on the 20th and on 22nd they took over old German dug-outs and trenches in the Reserve Brigade area. The next ten days were spent in supplying working parties, and carrying parties from dumps at Trones Wood to support and front-line trenches.

Orders issued towards the end of August were to the effect that the 20th Division would capture Guillemont and then establish itself on the Wedge Wood – Ginchy road. Two earlier attempts to capture Guillemont had failed. Due to the 60th Brigade's depleted numbers, the attack was entrusted to the 59th Brigade and the battalion was attached to this Brigade for the attack on Guillemont. It left the craters at 11pm on 2 September and moved into the position of assembly in Arrow and Sherwood trenches, and at noon on 3 September it advanced from its trenches to attack Guillemont. The three leading companies lost all their officers and all their Company Sergeants-Major before reaching the second Sunken Road. The fourth company also lost its Captain at the first Sunken Road. 300 troops of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry's 6th Battalion were in the 59th Brigade area on the Ginchy – Wedge Wood Road. It was during this successful operation that George Podbury was killed, aged 26 years.

George Stephenson Podbury is remembered with honour on Thiepval Memorial, the memorial to the missing of the Somme. It bears the names of 72,000 officers and men of the United Kingdom and South African forces, who died in the Somme sector before March 1918 and have no known grave.

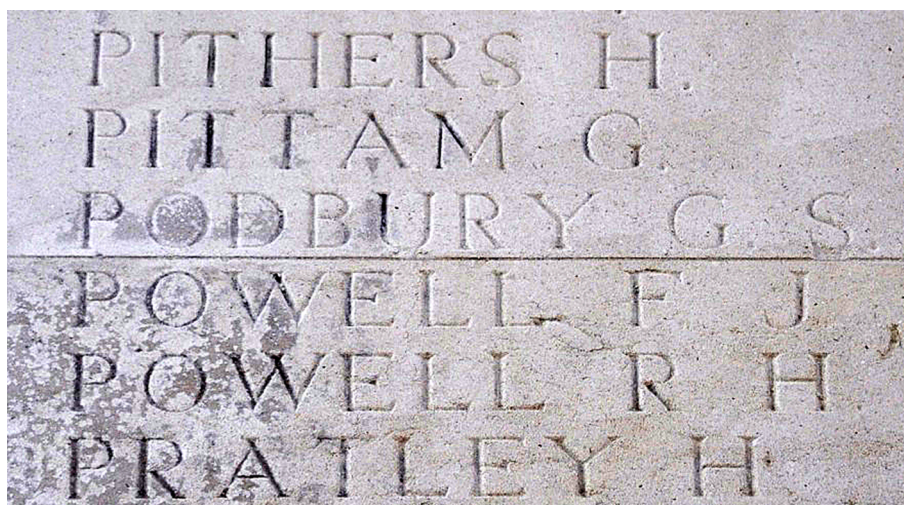


Photo: Chalmers Cursley

George's brother, William, of Brooklyn, Station Road, Amersham, communicated the news of his brother's death to the *Bucks Examiner*. William was a blacksmith who enlisted after his brother's death, but returned home safely in 1919.



William Podbury (Photo: Courtesy Jean Podbury)

Besides the Amersham War Memorial, George is also remembered on the Amersham Kings Church (Baptist) memorial plaque and on his parents' grave in Amersham Cemetery with the words:

"Pte. George S.Podbury (Oxf. & Bucks L.I.) son of the above, who fell in the successful investment of Bullecourt, Battle of the Somme, Sept 3 1916. 'After life's fitful fever they sleep well'."

His sister Ellen is also buried in the grave. Unfortunately the information regarding George on the grave is not correct and must be due to a lapse of memory by a member of the family. A regimental archivist and the Regimental Chronicle confirm the movements of the 6th Bn. at the time of Pte. Podbury's death.

George Podbury was awarded The Allied Victory Medal, The British War Medal, 1914-18 and The 1915 Star.

Sources:

The Long, Long Trail: www.1914-1918.net
Lightbobs: www.lightbobs.com
Family Search: www.familysearch.org
The War Graves Photographic Project: www.twgpp.org
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St. Mary's School, Amersham: School Records
Crosse, R.B. *A Short History of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry*, 1741-1922, for the Young Soldiers of the Regiment.
Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry Museum
Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry Regimental Chronicle, 1916-1917, 6th Bn. Record
Miss Jean Podbury, Chesham, great-niece of George Stephenson Podbury