

Robert William Toop
Private 40016, 12th Battalion,
Middlesex Regiment (Duke of Cambridge's Own)
Formerly B23292 Royal Fusiliers

Robert William Toop was born 1895 in the St Pancras district of London. He was the second son of James Ernest Augustus Toop and Mary Amy (née Mordaunt). Robert was baptised at Marylebone All Souls on 19 March 1895. In the baptismal register the family's address was given as 73 Great Portland Street.

The 1901 Census showed the family living at 34 Winchester Ave, Willesden. However Robert aged 6 and his brother Reginald aged 7 were not listed as present although their siblings, Alexander aged 5 and Mary aged 2, were at the family home.

In 1911 the whole family was living at 247 Fordwych Road, Cricklewood, London NW, and Robert was listed as a clerk working for a ship broker. His father was a minor composer and author of 'The Organist and his Choir.' Around this time an entry in *The Biographical Dictionary of Organists* notes that Augustus Toop, born in 1869 at Westminster, had attended Trinity College [of Music] in London and was a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists. He had been appointed organist at the Italian Mission in London in 1883, All Saints Norfolk Square in 1886, St Peter's Belsize Park in 1891 and St Peter's Vere Street in 1891. He had published a number of arrangements for the organ, including a *Te Deum Laudamus in D Satb*.

According to *Soldiers Died in the Great War*, Robert enlisted at High Beech in Essex and served first in the Royal Fusiliers, but his medal card bears no mention of the earlier regiment.



Badge of the Middlesex Regiment (Duke of Cambridge's Own)
Picture courtesy: Wikipedia

The 12th (Service) Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment was formed at Mill Hill in August 1914 as part of Kitchener's Second New Army. As part of the 54th Brigade of the 18th (Eastern) Division, the battalion moved to Colchester and then on to Codford on Salisbury Plain in May 1915, eventually landing at Le Havre on 26 July 1915. During the **battle of the Somme** it came under the command of Major General Ivor Maxse who is regarded as one of the most innovative generals of the First World War and whose Division was seen as part of the elite of the British Army. During 1916 the 12th battalion fought at **Albert, Bazentin Ridge, Delville Wood, Thiepval Heights, Ancre Heights and on the Ancre** and continued to serve until it was disbanded in France on 13 February 1918.

The **Battle of Flers–Courcelette** was a phase within the Franco-British Somme Offensive which

took place in the summer and autumn of 1916. Launched on 15 September the battle went on for one week. Flers–Courcelette began with the objective of cutting a hole in the German line by using massed artillery and infantry attacks. This hole would then be exploited with the use of cavalry. It was the third and final general offensive mounted by the British Army during the **Battle of the Somme**. By its conclusion on 22nd September, the strategic objective of a breakthrough had not been achieved; however tactical gains were made in the capture of the villages of Courcelette, Martinpuich and Flers. The battle is significant for the first use of the tank in warfare.

The area continued to be fought over and Robert was killed in action on 27 October 1916, aged 22.

He is buried in Regina Trench Cemetery, Grandcourt, Somme, France and was awarded The Allied Victory Medal and The British War Medal, 1914-18.



Regina Trench Cemetery, Grandcourt, Somme, France
Picture courtesy: Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Courcelette is found just to the north of the main D929 road between Albert and Bapaume. At the beginning of the Somme Battles in July 1916 this village was well within German-held territory, and it was not until mid-September that the British advanced this far. After its capture, Courcelette remained near the front lines until the Germans withdrew to the Hindenburg Line early in 1917, but it was taken again in their Spring Offensive on 25 March 1918. Five months later the British retook it as they advanced in the final few months of the War.

To the north-west of the village at the end of a track is Regina Trench Cemetery. This was originally a German earthwork to the north of Courcelette, running roughly along a north-east to south-west line, part of which was used as a cemetery from autumn 1916. It was extended after the Armistice as bodies were recovered from the battlefields of Courcelette, Grandcourt and Miraumont. 2279 soldiers are buried or commemorated there, of whom 1077 could not be identified.

As the Toop family had no obvious roots in Amersham, we need to account for why Robert is commemorated here.

The 1928 Kelly's *Directory* lists 'Toop, Augustus, Courcelette, Cokes Lane, Amersham', but it is not known where the house stood or whether Augustus was perhaps an organist in one of the local churches. He died there on 27 November 1944.

Links to the Toop family were found on Ancestry and thanks are due to two distant cousins of Robert Toop for sharing what they knew and helping to build a picture of the family.

Robert's elder brother Reginald Ernest Mordaunt Toop was in the Royal Engineers and was posted to Egypt in November 1914, serving successively as Private, Sergeant and Second Lieutenant. He died in 1970.

His younger brother, Alexander George Toop, went to France in April 1917 serving as Second Lieutenant and then Lieutenant in the Royal Garrison Artillery, which was using 12 inch road howitzers. He sailed from London aboard the *Shidzuoka Maru* on 24 Dec 1919, giving his occupation as planter. His address in 1921 when he applied for his medals was The Mount, Wardieburn Estate, Kuala Lumpur, Federated Malay States. He died in Australia in 1981 and is thought to have had no children.

Their sister Mary Gladys Violet Toop married in 1942 Samuel Croucher and when he died in 1965 they were living at Little Mead, Maplefield Lane, Chalfont St Giles. There were no children and she died in 1980 in Kent.

Both the cousins expressed satisfaction that Robert Toop was to be included in this publication.

Robert William Toop is remembered with Honour in the
Regina Trench Cemetery, Grandcourt, Somme, France
(Grave ref. Sp. Men. A.6.)