

## **Henry Frank West**

### **Private 2221, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment)**

**Henry Frank West** was born on 12 June 1892 and christened on 18 September at St. Michael's Parish Church, Highgate, London (formerly in the county of Middlesex). He was the fourth child of Alfred George and Jane (née Garrod) West, and the family were living at 23 North Road, Highgate, a home they lived in for many years as noted in the Censuses from 1891 through to 1911. Alfred and Jane were both born in Highgate and his occupation was listed as chimney cleaner (or sweep). Work was obviously abundant in this area of London, hence they would have had no reason to move from the North Road address. They had four children all living at the time of the 1911 Census, Henry's siblings being Emma Ellen born in 1882, Alfred George born in 1885 and Frances Mabel (named Winifred on 1901 Census) born in 1887.

It is not known whether Henry Frank followed his parents to become a chimney sweep, if so this was for a short period of time. In the 1911 Census his occupation is listed as "domestic chauffeur". Aged 18 years, he is lodging in St Margaret at Cliffe in Kent, but gives his address as 23 North Road, Highgate. In the 1901 Census a gentleman by the name of Abram Lyle (a sugar refiner – whose company was in the future to merge with Henry Tate's company to form Tate and Lyle) was also living in Highgate, and in the 1911 Census Abram was also recorded as residing in St Margaret at Cliffe, Kent. At the same time the Lyle family were also living at Beel House, Amersham Common. Henry Frank was the Lyle's family chauffeur, and this is further confirmed in his obituary published in the *Bucks Examiner* 21 May 1915; referring to him as Harry, it states that he was "formerly chauffeur to Capt. A. A. Lyle, Beel House", A. A. being Abram's son Abram Arthur Lyle.

#### **Beel House, Amersham Common**

The house has a long history. In Tudor times the area belonged to the Dukes of Buckingham, descendants of the Mandeville family who had been granted land in the area following the Conquest. Mary Pennington, mother of Gulielma Springett who married William Penn, the Quaker who founded Pennsylvania, is believed to have lived at Beel House during the seventeenth century with her second husband, Isaac Pennington.

The house was considerably altered in the 18th century and in the early 19th century was the home of Lt Henry William Mason, High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire, who had married a niece of Lord Nelson, Horatia Matcham. By 1881 the house was occupied by Dennis Milner, a barrister and JP, and his widow Frances was still living there in 1901 and employing members of several local families, including the butler Walter Birch, father of Frank Birch.

By 1911 the younger Lyle children were being cared for there in the absence of older members of the family.

Later the house would pass into the hands of Dirk Bogarde who, having paid £4,000 for it, knocked down a wing of 11 rooms and built a swimming pool. He also built an embankment to block out the view of Dr Challoner's High School. More recently the house has been lived in by Ozzy Osbourne and Robert Kilroy-Silk. It is situated off Snells Lane, Little Chalfont, HP7 9QP.

Both Abram Arthur Lyle and Henry Frank West were in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Royal Fusiliers - Abram A as a Captain. There were several others working on the Beel House Estate who enlisted at this time, possibly into the same regiment.

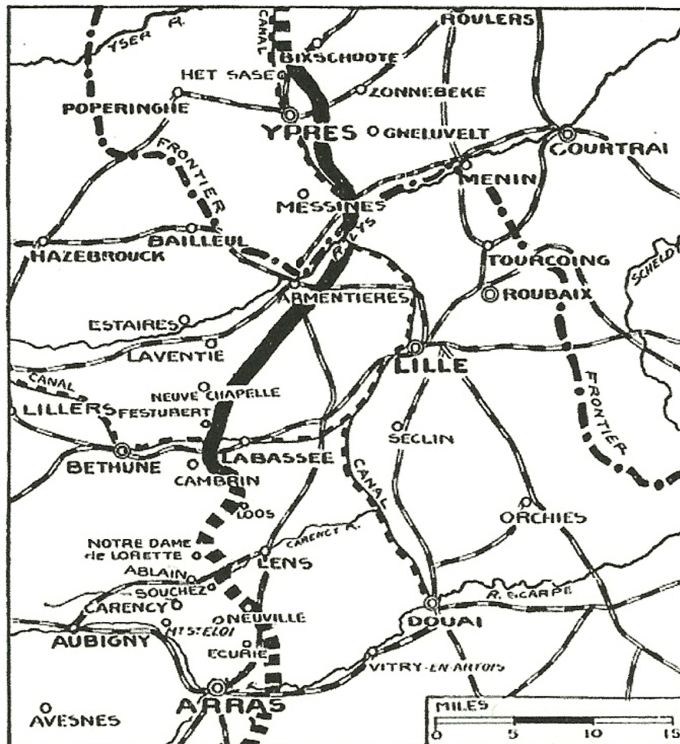
Henry Frank West enlisted in the early summer of 1914 at Handel Street, Bloomsbury, London, where the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers had its Drill Hall. In August of that year it was part of the London Division and, like other Royal Fusilier Battalions of the London Regiment, was posted to

the Malta Garrison in September 1914, before being recalled to England prior to crossing to France in March 1915. The *War Diaries*<sup>1</sup> detail the movement and action of the battalion through the next few weeks.

By 1 May the battalion were in the trenches at Rue Tilleloy where they were under constant shelling and sniper fire. On the 2 May mortars bombarded the trenches, with one bomb landing in the trench and wounding 5 men. The following day the battalion was relieved and moved to billets at Lavente, although relief was not without incident as the withdrawal was seen by enemy machine-gunners who opened fire killing 2 and wounding 6 others. The *War Diaries* recorded that this was the first time the battalion had suffered casualties during a relief.

On the 4 May 1915, although in billets, the battalion found a working party of 400 men to work digging assembly trenches near La Cordonnerie and, without rest, the following day marched to new billets in Sailly. However, on the 7<sup>th</sup> further orders were received for an attack on Fromelles and the following day the battalion marched at 11pm to assembly trenches near to Rue Petillan, where it prepared for the forthcoming attack.

At 5.00 a.m. on 9 May 1915 the **Battle for Aubers Ridge** commenced with an artillery bombardment on the enemy trenches. The barrage lifted at 5.40 a.m. and the troops were ordered to attack. The first wave was met with heavy enemy artillery and rifle fire, causing severe losses. Although initial objectives were reached, the men were pinned down, which meant that following units could only reach the trenches in front of their own parapet and further advance was impossible.



The Battle of Aubers 9 May 1915  
Map of the British position.

The solid line represents the territory held by the British, the dotted line to the north showing the position of the Franco-Belgian Army, and the dotted line to the south the position of the French Army.

Following units were also unable to reach the German trenches, and eventually "bombing parties" were sent forward and succeeded in gaining part of the German trench but, because they ran out of bombs, they could not advance further. Once the first part of the German trench was occupied further troops were sent forward to defend it, but few reached the trench, because of machine gun fire from still-occupied German trenches. Although these were finally silenced, the battalion had suffered heavy casualties.

<sup>1</sup> The War Diaries of the Royal Fusiliers. The National Archives, Kew. WO 95/1730

The *War Diaries* state that communications during this time proved to be extremely difficult, due to the ground between opposing trenches being subject to intense German machine-gun fire from hostile trenches which had not been touched by the initial artillery bombardment.

Following a day of intense fighting and great losses, with no hope of achieving their goal, at 4.00 pm an order was issued to withdraw from the occupied trenches. This, however, was not possible in daylight and would have to wait until nightfall. At 8.00 p.m the situation deteriorated with the enemy attacking from the rear and both flanks and, as they had no machine-guns or bombs left, orders were issued for the troops to return to their own lines. The result of the action on that day was that the battalion lost 28 killed or died of wounds, plus 172 wounded and 77 missing.

At 11.00 p.m on 9 May 1915, orders were received for the battalion to proceed to billets south of Bac St Maur.

Henry (Harry) Frank West lost his life on 9 May 1915, at the age of 22 years. In his Will he left all his worldly possessions to his mother at 23 North Road, Highgate. His body was never identified.

Henry was awarded The Allied Victory Medal, The British War Medal, 1914-18 and The 1914-15 Star.



Ploegsteert Memorial, Photograph: Hazel Garas, 2014

Henry Frank West is remembered with Honour  
Ploegsteert Memorial, Hainaut, Belgium, panel 10

Sources:

Amersham Museum - for their help in researching Beel House  
The National Archives - War Office Records  
WO 95/1730 - *War Diary*  
WO 372 - British Army WW1 Medal Rolls Index Cards 1914 -1920.  
*The Bucks Examiner* Archive Records  
The Long Long Trail ([www.1914-1918.net](http://www.1914-1918.net)).