

## Sidney Wilkins

### ***Private, No. 23078, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Worcestershire Regiment***

**Sidney Wilkins** was born in March 1897 in Winchmore Hill, Amersham, the first child of George and Laura Elizabeth Wilkins (née Rogers). George was born in Amersham and his occupation is listed in the 1901 Census as a Windsor chair framer, and then Windsor chair maker in the 1911 Census. The occupation of Laura, who was born in Penn, is given as bead-work agent, which was a job in the chair-making industry. In 1901 the family were living in Winchmore Hill, Penn Street, Penn and they had three children, Sidney the eldest, Dorothy b.1902 and Ronald b.1905. However, tragedy was to come to the family as in March 1907 Laura died at the age of 28, leaving George to look after Sidney, Dorothy and Ronald, which he did until he met and married Kate Mary Higgs in December 1910. Kate was born in High Wycombe in June 1880; and George had a further child by her: George Frederick was born in March 1912. By the time of the 1911 Census Sidney was 14 years old and at school; and the family were living at 'The Old Griffin', Mop End, Amersham. *Kelly's Directory for Buckinghamshire 1915* lists George Wilkins as a beer retailer at 'The Old Griffin'. Whether he undertook this activity after chair making or at the same time is unknown.

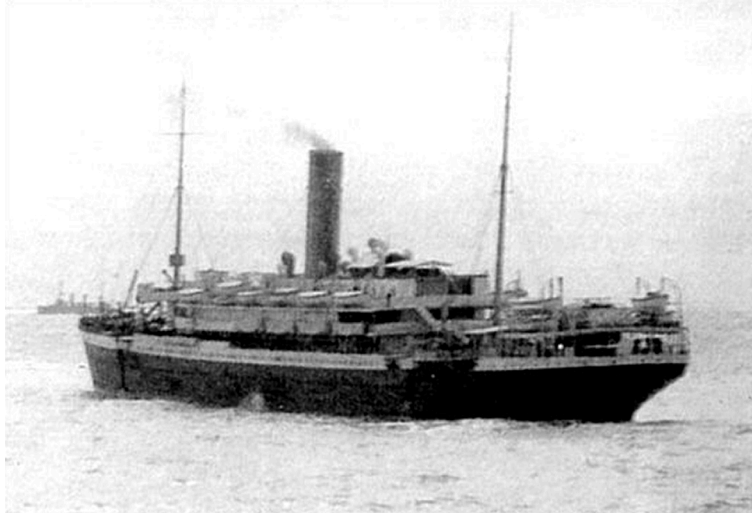


"The Griffin", Mop End, Near Amersham. The tile-like objects under the boards in the foreground are Windsor chair seats ready for chair making when seasoned. Mop End, or as it was known locally, 'The Mop', was a small isolated community, consisting of only a farm, a public house, and a couple of cottages, at the top of Shardeloes Great Park. The Mop was considered an outstanding beauty spot, renowned for its wild flowers, and was a favourite destination for picnics. The pub, 'The Griffin' included tea gardens, popular with London ramblers who visited the district in droves between the wars. It was also a depot for the chair industry, and George Wilkins, landlord for thirty years, was listed in directories as chair manufacturer. The pub, pictured in about 1915, is now closed, but the rural retreat retains its solitude, despite the proximity of a huge electricity station, fortunately hidden in the adjacent woodland. (*Amersham in old picture postcards* Vol. 2, Colin J. Seabright)

It is not known whether Sidney, after leaving school, followed his father into the chair-manufacturing industry.

It can be deduced from the date of his birth and the date of his death that he lied about his age and enlisted before his eighteenth birthday. He enlisted at High Wycombe and was posted to the 4<sup>th</sup>. Battalion Worcester Regiment, which was based in Leamington, Warwickshire, following its return from Meiktila, Burma, in February 1915.

In March 1915 the battalion received orders, left their base and travelled to Avonmouth where they embarked and set sail for Malta on 22 March where they arrived on 31 March. The following day, after refuelling, the regiment sailed for Egypt and arrived in Alexandria on 4 April where they disembarked to camp at Mustapha Pasha Barracks. However, the stay was short as on 8 April they boarded HM Troopship *Aragon* and sailed for the Greek island of Lemnos (Limnos), which is close to the Turkish mainland.



HMT *Aragon* served as a troop ship in the First World War. In 1917 she was sunk in the Mediterranean by a German submarine with the loss of 610 lives. Image © Imperial War Museum.<sup>1</sup>

Arriving at the main port of Mudros on 13 April 1915, the regiment disembarked and were allowed time to recover from the voyage and acclimatise before being sent to the front. At their base in Lemnos they could hear the gunfire from the battle front. Then on 24 April the regiment sailed for Gallipoli, and landed at Cape Helles the following day under heavy shell and rifle fire. The troops were landed with small boats, which was a very slow process. This resulted in the initial force being pinned down on the beaches, suffering great loss of life, until the numbers were strong enough to break through and gain a solid foothold. The first few days of the battle involved a series of advances, retreats and advances. The main reason that the positions were not consolidated was the inability to get supplies and reinforcements to the front quickly enough due to the lack of roads. Over the coming weeks, the conflict developed into a "trench war".

Neither the exact date nor the location where Sidney was wounded is recorded, but the timing of his death suggests he was a casualty of a major offensive carried out on 6 and 7 August by the 88<sup>th</sup>. Brigade (of which the 4th Bn Worcestershire Regiment were part). They were ordered to attack and take the enemy trenches.

The attack commenced at 2.20pm with an artillery bombardment. The Turkish artillery responded with very heavy shrapnel and high explosive fire on the British trenches which caused a considerable number of casualties. Field artillery and machine guns continued the bombardment as the troops were ordered to leave the trenches and attack at 3.50pm. The Worcestershire Regiment, who were on the right flank of the attack, at first encountered very little fire, until they approached their objective when heavy machine-gun and rifle fire was aimed at them. It is recorded that small

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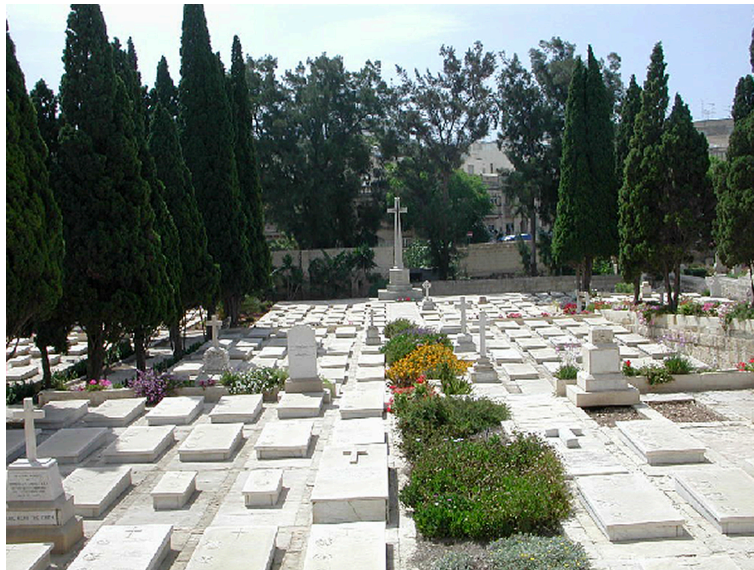
<sup>1</sup> An interesting account of the sinking of HMT *Aragon* can be read at <http://www.merchantnavyofficers.com/rm2.html>.

parties of men reached and entered the enemy trenches, but the majority were either killed or wounded in their attack. Those who reached the trenches were subject to intensive counterattacks by the Turks, using bombs, machine-gun and rifle fire, but in spite of many casualties they held on till after dark. During the night those that were left gradually found their way back to their own trenches, as did many of the wounded. Night patrols were sent out to ascertain whether any of their men were holding isolated parts of hostile trenches, but none were found. The brigade was then relieved by the 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade on 7 August 1915.

The *War Diary*, under the heading *General Remarks*, states "The advance of all battalions appears to have been most gallantly carried out and the failure of the attack can only be attributed to the exceedingly heavy rifle, machine gun and shell fire which the Turks were able to bring on the attacking troops. The casualties among the attacking troops were in all cases well over 50%"

Injured during this conflict, Sidney was taken to hospital in Malta where he died of his wounds on 22 August 1915, aged 19 years. He was awarded The Allied Victory Medal, The British War Medal, 1914-18 and The 1914-15 Star.

Sidney Wilkins is remembered with Honour and buried in  
Pieta Military Cemetery, Malta, Grave Ref. A.IX.



Pieta Military Cemetery, Malta.

Picture courtesy: Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Sidney Wilkins is also remembered on the Winchmore Hill Memorial Hall Plaque and the War Memorial of Holy Trinity Church, Penn Street.

Sources:

Ray Westlake: *British Battalions at Gallipoli*

The National Archives - War Office Records WO 95/4312 - *War Diary* - 88<sup>th</sup>.Brigade - Gallipoli

WO 372 - British Army WW1 Medal Rolls Index Cards 1914 - 1920

Colin J Seabright: *Amersham in old picture postcards – Volume 2*, photo of "The Old Griffin, Mop End"

*Kelly's Directory for Buckinghamshire 1915*

Worcestershire Regiment Records ([www.worcestershireregiment.com](http://www.worcestershireregiment.com))

*The Long, Long Trail* ([www.1914-1918.net](http://www.1914-1918.net))