

THE BOLTON FAMILY

Francis Bolton 1877 – July 1916

Edward Bolton 1879 – April 1917

Henry Thomas (Harry) Bolton 1889 – January 1917

The tragic deaths of these three brothers within nine months of each other must have been devastating for their parents and siblings. Thomas and Ruth Bolton, the parents, had a family of 12 children, nine boys and three girls and seem to have favoured group baptisms: William, Sarah, Ruth, John and Emily were all christened on 4 October 1874; Frederick, Francis and Edward on 16 November 1879; Albert christened individually on 20 April 1887 and finally Henry Thomas, Walter and Arthur on 4 November 1891. The family lived in Red Lion Lane, Amersham Common, the father working as a brewery labourer, probably at Weller's brewery, Old Amersham.

Francis Bolton

Private 22235, 1st Battalion, Bedfordshire Regiment

Francis Bolton was born about 1877 at his parents' home in Amersham Common and was baptised on 16 November 1879 in Amersham. In the 1891 Census he was still living at home, aged about 14, with his parents and six siblings. By the time of the 1901 Census Francis was living at 30 Turner Road in Strood, Kent with wife Alice and was working as a general labourer. He was in Paddington in 1911 at 46 Goldney Road. He and Alice had been married for eleven years, but there were no children. Francis was a general labourer for a builder. His last known address was in West Kilburn.

Francis Bolton enlisted in London, in the 1st Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment as a private, but the date is unknown.

The 1st Battalion's Service in the Great War¹

The 1st Battalion was a Regular Army battalion, who were based at Mullingar in Ireland, at the outbreak of war. On mobilization they left Ireland as part of 15th Infantry Brigade in the 5th Division.

14 -15 Aug 1914 - en route to Le Havre. The Battalion entrained at Mullingar about 2.00 a.m. and embarked at Belfast on S.S. *Oronsay*, about 2.00 p.m., and sailed for Le Havre, arriving there night of 15th.

They went down in history as one of the battalions of 'Old Contemptibles' who fought against the German Kaiser's larger armies in the early engagements of the war. The original soldiers of the 1st and 2nd Battalions were amongst the 'Old Contemptibles' - the title proudly adopted by the men of the original British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) who saw active service before 22 November 1914. They were the professional soldiers of the British army, almost all of whom were regular soldiers or reservists. In 1914 they fought at the battles of **Mons** and **Le Cateau** in August, the battles of **the Marne and the Aisne** in September, at the **battle of La Bassée** in October and during the Battle of Ypres 1914 (also known as the First Battle of Ypres) in November.

In 1915 the 1st Btn of the Bedfordshires was heavily engaged during the **Battle of Ypres 1915** (also known as the Second Battle of Ypres) in April and May, where they fought at Hill 60 during the initial capture and subsequent defence that saw them lose so heavily that they were effectively rebuilt

¹ www.bedfordregiment.org

twice during the fighting.

The Medal Index card for Francis Bolton shows that he did not qualify for The 1914-15 Star and therefore must have enlisted after the end of 1915. Conscription began in January 1916 and it is likely that he, as a married man of about 38 years of age, was conscripted into the army. He was one of many recruits needed to top up the original battalions which had lost so many casualties.

In 1916 the 1st Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment was involved in several phases of the **Battle of the Somme**, namely the attacks on **High Wood** 20 - 25 July, at **Longueval**, 27 - 30 July the Battle of **Guillemont** (specifically the capture of Falfemont Farm 3 - 6 September) and the Battle of **Fliers-Courcelette** (specifically the Battle of **Morval** on 25 September).

Francis Bolton was killed in action in France on 31 July 1916 (aged 39). His body was never identified.

He was awarded The British War Medal, 1914-18 and The Allied Victory Medal.

Francis Bolton is remembered with Honour
Thiepval Memorial, Somme, (reference Pier and Face 2C)

For details of the Memorial and engraving see the chapter on Memorials to the Missing.

Edward Bolton

Lance Corporal 18963, 5th Battalion, The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry

Edward Bolton was born in November 1879 at his parents' home in Amersham Common and was baptised on 16 November 1879 in Amersham. He was a railway labourer. He enlisted at High Wycombe into the 5th Battalion of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (OBLI) and arrived in France on 5 October 1915.

The 5th (Service) Battalion was raised at Oxford in August 1914 as part of Kitchener's First New Army (K1) and joined 42nd Brigade, 14th (Light) Division. After training they proceeded to France, landing at Boulogne on 21 May 1915. They fought in the action at **Hooze**, being the first division to be attacked by flamethrowers. They were in action in the **Second Attack on Bellewaarde**. In 1916 they were on the **Somme** seeing action in the **Battle of Delville Wood** and the **Battle of Fliers-Courcelette**. In 1917 they fought in The German retreat to the Hindenburg Line and the First and Third **Battle of the Scarpe at Arras**.

The 5th Battalion OBLI took part in the great British offensive which opened on 9 April 1917 on a ten-mile front from the south of Arras to the south of Lens. The offensive was known as **the Battle of Arras**. Prior to the offensive, on 4 April the Btn moved to the Dunedin caves, one of six large caves accommodating 5000 men. (The caves were originally made by quarrying chalk for the building of Arras, had been connected by tunnels dug by New Zealand miners, and had electricity laid on. They were named after New Zealand cities; Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin). The city of Arras had been mostly destroyed by German shelling and the caves provided a safe shelter for thousands of British troops. The caves were kitted out as army barracks, with bunk-beds, tables and chairs, latrines and kitchens. There was a small altar where the chaplain said prayers before the battle. Some of the soldiers who were camped in the caves did drawings on the walls. The 5th Battalion left the caves in silence via tunnel exits by 9.00 p.m. on 8 April and were in the assembly trenches by midnight.



The cave and tunnel system underneath Arras, in which thousands of British troops sheltered in the days leading up to the offensive. Edward Bolton was one of those soldiers. (Photographed in 2014)

Detailed and elaborate plans for the attack on the 'Harp' redoubt were issued between 3 and 7 April. From 3 to 5 April a heavy bombardment on the 'Harp' was carried out. The 5th Btn OBLI was given the first objective which was to capture the Negrine trench system and Telegraph Work, which formed the 'string' of the Harp.

Edward Bolton was killed aged 38 on 9 April 1917, the first day of the **Battle of Arras**. He was a member of D Company during the attack on a very strong defensive work known as "The Harp", on account of its singular shape, just east of the city. A heavy and accurate bombardment of the objective, preceding the attack, had destroyed much of the defence works and the British were able to advance rapidly and consolidate the position, taking about a hundred German prisoners in the process. Battalion casualties in the engagement totalled about two hundred, and sadly Edward was among those who died on the battlefield that day. According to the *Chronicle of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry*,² the battlefield was cleared of casualties by 5.00 p.m. on the same day with the assistance of German prisoners.

Edward was awarded The Allied Victory Medal and The British War Medal, 1914-18 and, having entered the theatre of war in France on 5 October 1915, as confirmed on his Medal Record Card, he also qualified for the award of The 1914-15 Star.

Edward Bolton is remembered with Honour in the
Tilloy British Cemetery, Tilloy-les-Mofflaines, Pas de Calais (grave ref. III H1)



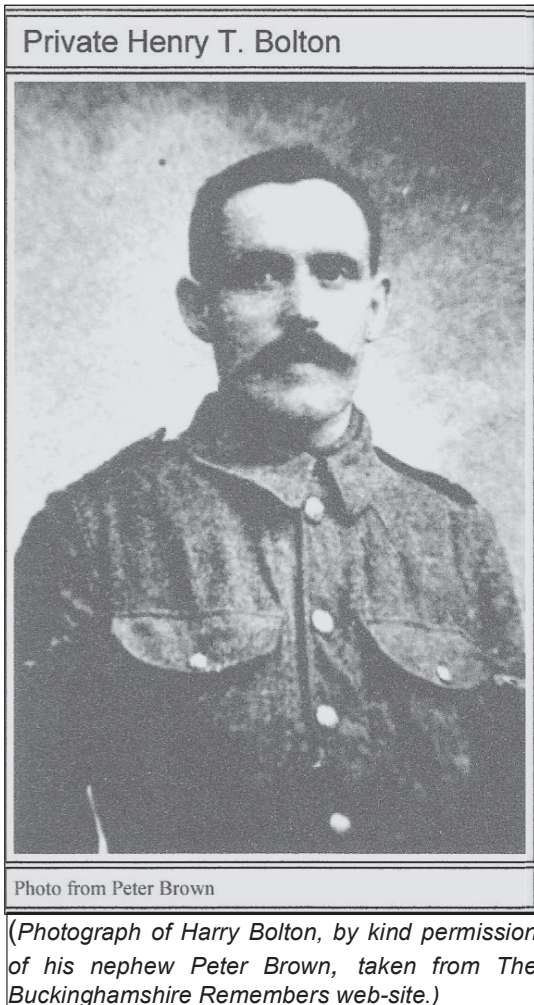
Tilloy-les-Mofflaines is a village located 3 kms south-east of Arras. The village was taken by Commonwealth troops on 9 April 1917, the day that Edward died. The cemetery was begun in 1917 and there are 1031 identified casualties interred there.

Photograph courtesy of the
Commonwealth War Graves Commission

² *Chronicle of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry 1916- 19187* Record of the 5th Battalion. Eyre and Spottiswoode Ltd.

Henry Thomas (Harry) Bolton

Lance Corporal 3268, 1st Battalion, East Surrey Regiment



Harry Bolton's birth was registered between January and March 1889. His parents' lived in Amersham Common and he was baptised on 4 November 1891 in Amersham. He worked as a nurseryman and in 1911 was boarding in a seven-roomed house in Amersham Common, the home of John Scott, a baker and grocer. He married Rose Birch in 1915. She lived at the time of his death at 160 Broad Street, Chesham. Their last known residence together was Gerrards Cross. Rose Birch was the sister of F J Birch 201322 who died on 8 December 1916 and whose name is on the Chesham War Memorial.

Harry enlisted at Harrow, Middlesex and is mentioned in the *Bucks Examiner* of 27 November 1914. Len Scott and Ernest Grimsdell, also from Amersham Common, joined the East Surrey Regiment at the same time. Harry entered the theatre of war in France on 18 February 1915. The 1st Battalion of the East Surreys joined the 14th Brigade of the 5th Division of the British Expeditionary Force and during the first few months of the War gained honours at **Mons, Le Cateau, on the Marne** and on the **Aisne**. In the Spring it probably achieved its finest feat of the War in the **Defence of Hill 60** near Ypres on 23 April 1915. The 1st Battalion served in France during the entire War except for a short tour in Italy from 1917 to Spring 1918.

In January 1916 the battalion was transferred to the 95th Brigade, 5th Division and during that year it was engaged in several phases of the **Battle of the Somme**, including the battles of **High Wood, Guillemont, Flers-Courcelette** and distinguished itself notably at **Morval**. The 1st Battalion left the Somme on 5 October 1916 and was holding a quieter line near Festubert. However, there was constant threat from enemy artillery and sniper fire. Lance Corporal Harry Bolton was killed in action, according to various documents, on 1 January 1917 aged 27. Strangely, the *War Diary* of the 1st Btn states that there were no casualties on that day. The Battalion was in the Givenchy Right subsection on that day, near to Gorre.

Harry Bolton was awarded The 1914-15 Star as well as The Allied Victory Medal and The British War Medal, 1914-18. The double bereavement for Rose Bolton (née Birch) of her brother and husband within a very short time of each other must have been extremely sad. The *Buckinghamshire Examiner* of 12 January 1917 records that in a letter of sympathy from an officer to Harry's widow he states that he "*was an excellent soldier and one of my best corporals. He met his death while bringing up the men's tea and looking after the comfort of others*".

Harry Bolton is remembered with Honour and buried in the
Gorre British and Indian Cemetery, Pas de Calais
(Grave ref. III D25)



Photograph courtesy of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Gorre British and Indian Cemetery is located in a corner of the grounds of the Gorre Chateau. It contains the graves of 893 Commonwealth servicemen of the First World War.

The chateau stood behind the British lines and remained intact during the fighting, despite the area being bombarded by German artillery occasionally. The chateau was used as an officers' mess and head-quarters of British units stationed in the area. Throughout 1916 and '17 British troops could be seen drilling in the fields or unloading supplies from barges on the La Bassée Canal, which runs just south of the village of Gorre.

Harry Bolton is also remembered on the memorial at The Free Church, Amersham.