

Charles Begley.

Private, No. 154526 Royal Medical Corps formerly No.180 Kings Royal Rifles.

Charles Begley was born on the 16th December 1876ⁱ to parents Joseph and Maria (nee Bedlam) and baptised on the 28th July 1878 in the Parish Church of Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire, on the same day as his brothers Samuel and Frederick. In December 1883 Maria died and within two years Joseph had married Rebecca Hodgkins. The family moved from Bidford-on-Avon to Evesham. Between them, Maria and Rebecca produced 19 children.

Upon leaving school Charles followed the same occupation as the males of previous generations of the family, that of a Chimney Sweep.

Shortly after the declaration of war with the Boers in South Africa in October 1899 Charles signed his attestation papers, on the 20th January 1900, in Evesham, to join the Kings Royal Rifle Corps. Five days later he was in Gosport and on the 30th March, was posted to the 4th Battalion, service No.2629. The Battalion remained in England until February 1901 when it sailed for active service in South Africa. On 14th April 1901 Charles received his Lance Corporal's stripe but in September of the following year reverted to the rank of Rifleman. During his active service against the Boers he was accidentally wounded at Mooi River. The 1903/4 campaign in Somaliland followed. His medal awarded tally included Clasps -1901/2 Cape Colony, Orange Free State, Transvaal and Africa General Service Medal. Clasps - Somaliland 1903 and 1904. Returning home in 1905 he transferred to the Army reserve and was discharged on the 19th January 1912 having completed his full 12 years with the colours: five years of active service and seven as a Reservist.

James Begley, Charles's elder brother, arrived in Wellesbourne around 1899 with his wife Ann Jane and son, Charles Edward. Here he established a Chimney Sweep business from his home at No. 1 Garden Terrace. During the early months of 1911, James died. The official Census of that year, taken on the 2nd April, records that his brother Charles had arrived in the village and was now boarding with James's family.

On declaration of war with Germany in August 1914 James's son, Charles Edward was one of the first from Wellesbourne to volunteer for army service, followed not long after by Charles. Charles's military career was not however to be as illustrious in the Great War as it was in the South African campaign. On the 31st August at the Birmingham Town Hall Recruitment Office he signed his papers for the King's Royal Rifle Corps, (10th Battalion). Service No. 180 was allocated but by the end of September after just 31 days service he had been certified as medically unfit with 'Cardiac Disease' and dischargedⁱⁱ.

Of those names appearing on the Wellesbourne War Memorial Charles Edward was killed in action at Ypres in May 1915 to become the first village fatality of the Great War.

The local trade directories for 1914 suggest that following James's death in 1911 his son Charles Edward had taken over his father's business but after his death at Ypres in 1915 Charles had picked up the reinsⁱⁱⁱ.

On the 28th May 1917 Charles married Mary Elizabeth Maull in the Parish Church of St. Peter's in Wellesbourne and the couple continued to live at No.1 Garden Terrace. Mary was a native of Wellesbourne and the sister of Thomas Maull who was killed in action in France 12 months later. Charles and Elizabeth's daughter Dorothy Lucy was born on the 4th December 1917 followed by Charles William, Phyllis May and Constance Sybil after the war. Sadly their son died when only 3 years old.

During early August 1917 Charles was invited to report to a sitting of a Military Tribunal, to review his suitability for military service^{iv}. Having previously been discharged from the Army the decision was made that he would continue to be exempt from service providing he committed himself to three days a week working on the land.

In early July 1918, Charles was expected to report again before the Appeals Tribunal. However, he had already anticipated the situation and on the 24th June had reported to the Recruiting Office in Coventry^v. Now accepted as medically fit he was immediately posted to join the Royal Army Medical Corps (5th Training Battalion) with the rank of Private. On 25th March 1919 with the War now at an end he was discharged from 'E' Company of the R.A.M.C. as surplus to Military requirements but was however retained on the Reserve list. His claim for an additional pension because of rheumatism was rejected. With no service overseas Charles was not entitled to any service medals. His character, while in service however was reported as 'Very Good'.

Charles's name continued to appear in the trade directories as a Chimney Sweep at the same Garden Terrace address in Wellesbourne until 1936. His wife died in 1933. Charles lived the last few years of his life in Stratford upon Avon^{vi}. He died in early 1942.

Researched by Grev Hudson (grev.hudson@btinternet.com)(April 2016)

ⁱ 1939 Register.

ⁱⁱ On discharge Charles would have been entitled to the award of the silver War Badge however documents within his service record indicate that this was not issued.

ⁱⁱⁱ Spennels directories record that from 1900 up to 1912, the Chimney Sweep business operated from No.1 Garden Row was under the name of James Begley and from 1914 to 1936 under that of Charles.

^{iv} Stratford upon Avon Herald.25/8/1917.

^v Stratford upon Avon Herald 12/7/1918.

^{vi} The 1939 Register records him living at Barncote, Stratford upon Avon..

Other Sources:

Charles Begley service records via. Ancestry.com and Find My Past.