

Charles Edward Begley

Private, No 9778, the 2nd Battalion of the Oxford & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry.



Badge of the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry.

Viewing the history of the Begley family one could easily assume that when **Charles Edward Begley** entered this world on the 15th June 1894 in Treforest, Glamorganshire, his adult working life would be spent as a Chimney Sweep. For generations, back into the eighteenth century sons of sons followed the same occupation and the name Begley was synonymous with the occupation of Chimney Sweep in many parishes within the Midland and South Wales regions.

Charles's father, James, was born in Evesham. He took as his wife Anne Jane Begley, who originated from Shipston on Stourⁱ, a member of the wider Begley family. Charles was the eldest child and the family arrived in Garden Terrace, Wellesbourne as the nineteenth century was coming to its close. Charles attended the village school joining the infants section on the 3rd April 1899ⁱⁱ progressing to the junior level on the 3rd June 1902. In February 1905 he left the school and the family headed for London where they lived at 8, York Place. Charles attended the St. Martin in the Fields school, Westminsterⁱⁱⁱ. The stay in London was short, for by December of that year he had returned to school in Wellesbourne. On the 5th June 1905 he finally left there – to be a plough boy^{iv}.

Early in 1911 his father died at the age of 41 years and was buried in St. Peter's Churchyard on the 23rd March. By then, Charles had naturally entered the family business as a Chimney sweep.

In response to the start of what was to be called The Great War, it was reported in the 4th September 1914 edition of a local newspaper^v that the village of Wellesbourne had responded 'nobly' to the request for volunteers for Lord Kitchener's Army. The list included the name of Charles Begley who was in Barry Dock, Glamorganshire when he enlisted for war service. By the date of publication however Private Charles Begley, Service No 9778 of the 2nd. Battalion of the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry had already been in France for 3 weeks, having disembarked in Boulogne on the 14th August. As part of the 5th Infantry Brigade, 2nd Division it was one of the first Battalions of the British Expeditionary Force to arrive on the Western Front.

For him to be on active service so soon, Charles would have already been in the Territorial Reserve. His service no. 9778 indicates that he originally joined the Oxford & Bucks shortly after the 11th October 1912. On the 23rd August his Battalion was called into action in the first

battle of the War, at Mons. Numerically outnumbered the French and British were forced into a disastrous 220 mile retreat from Mons to the outskirts of Paris.

More battles followed for Charles and his Battalion, the Marne in September, the First Battle of Ypres in October and November and by year end, 632 Battalion casualties were recorded. Charles personally had many narrow escapes. On one occasion his rifle was shot from his hands and on another, his clothes were riddled with bullets^{vi}.

The War had settled into one of Trench Warfare as 1915 drew on. On the 15th May however, at the Battle of Festubert, the first British night attack of the war, following a 100,000 shell barrage that continued both day and night for 60 hours, elements of the 5th and 6th Brigades, as support to a French attack south of Vimy Ridge, advanced towards the German Lines. The 5th ran into heavy machine-gun fire and the 2nd Oxford and Bucks were sent forward as support. Cut down in No Man's Land the Battalion lost almost 400 men. Private Charles Edward Begley was one of the many that died as the battle entered its second day (16th), one month short of his 21st birthday. He was the first, from Wellesbourne, to die on the battlefields of the Great War.

Shortly after his death his mother received a letter from Corporal Samuel Rawbone announcing the sad news. Sam, born in Wellesbourne, served in the same Battalion as Charles and arrived with him in France on the same day^{vii}.

Before the war Charles had been connected with the Sunday school at the Wesleyan Chapel in Wellesbourne and on Sunday the 8th August 1915 a large congregation gathered there for a memorial service in his name

As his body was never recovered or identified he is commemorated on the Le Touret Memorial, Pas de Calais, France (Panel 26). He is also remembered on The Wellesbourne Church of England School Roll of Honour, The Roll of Honour for the Dead, St. Peter's Church, Wellesbourne and the Wellesbourne War Memorial.



Clasp for a 1914 Star.

In addition to the British and Victory medals, posthumously awarded to Charles, he also received the 1914 Mons Star with clasp. The clasp bears the dates '5th Aug – 22nd Nov 1914' and indicates that the recipient was subjected to enemy fire during that period. Charles Begley was therefore entitled to be called one of 'The Old Contemptibles' A great depth of gratitude is owed to these men who, in the early weeks of the war, held back the German advance whilst new battalions were being trained and equipped.

Footnote: After the death of his father, James, Charles's uncle also named Charles continued with the family business in Wellesbourne. He was subsequently called up for war service and served in the Royal Army Medical Corps. He returned home and married Elizabeth Maull, the sister of Thomas Maull whose name appears on the village War Memorial.

Researched by Grev Hudson (Apr. 2014)(grev.hudson@tinyworld.co.uk)

ⁱ There appears to be no record of a marriage between James and Ann Jane. It is assumed that Ann is the daughter of Bartholemew and Martha Begley, sister of Bartholemew. After the death of her son Charles, Ann is recorded by the CWGC as living at 1, Travis St. Barry Dock, the home of brother Bartholemew. The direct family connection between James and Ann goes back at least 2 generations. It should be also noted that Charles enlisted at Barry Dock.

ⁱⁱ Wellesbourne School Records CR371/1, CR371/2, CR371/3, CR371/4.(Warwick RO)

ⁱⁱⁱ London School Admissions and Discharges (1840 – 1911)



Great War in the Villages Project

- ^{iv} Possibly one who led the horse or Oxen on the plough.
- ^v Stratford upon Avon Herald 4th Sept 1914
- ^{vi} Stratford upon Avon Herald 13th Aug 1915
- ^{vii} Stratford upon Avon Herald 4th June 1915