

Cyril Thomas Kerwood Freeman.

Private, No 97452, 2nd Battalion Nottingham & Derbyshire Regiment, (The Sherwood Foresters)

Cyril Thomas Kerwood Freeman was the youngest from the villages of Wellesbourne and the hamlet of Walton to die in action during the Great War. Aged 19 years and 42 days he had been in France for only 39 days. He had therefore arrived in a combat zone just 3 days past the legal limit of 19 years set for armed service overseas.

Cyril entered this world on the 9th February 1899 and was baptised in the Wellesbourne village church on the 9th April, one of four children born to Joseph Thomas Freeman and his wife Amelia. His Christian name, Kerwood was taken from the maiden name of his mother. Joseph, his father, also born in Wellesbourne, had been taught the blacksmith's trade by his father John who had established his own business in Bridge Street prior to the start of the 1860s.



*WWI Cap Badge
of the Sherwood
Foresters.*

Joseph and Amelia lived in School Road with sons Cyril and Francis and daughter Victoria. Their youngest son Philip born in 1906 died after only a few months. Cyril attended the local school, and in view of the family background, it was no surprise that when he left the in the February of 1913, he became an apprentice blacksmith¹.

Cyril was already a member of the local Volunteer Training Corps when, on the 5th January 1917, he travelled the few miles to the recruiting office in Stratford upon Avon and signed the papers to join the army. He was aged just 17 years and 332 days and measured only five feet four and five eighth inches, smaller than the average height of his peers at the time, but taller than the minimum required height of five feet three inches. He gave his occupation as an agricultural engineer. The following day he was transferred to the Army Reserve 'B' for 2 months. Technically he was under the minimum age of 18 years for signing on and a period in the reserves would legitimise the process. For a two week period in March he was at the Army Service Depot at Grove Park where presumably his original service number M/300626 was allocated.

In late March 1917 and for the next 8 months Cyril moved between training battalions, and transferred in late November to the 3rd Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters. His service number became 97452. The 13th of February 1918 was the day he joined the British Expeditionary Force in France and was posted 5 days later to the 2nd Battalion of the Foresters (6th Division, 71st Brigade).

Joseph Freeman received notification from the War Office, during the early part of April 1918 that his son Cyril had been killed in action at some time between the 21st and 27th March.

It was on the 21st March that the German Army unleashed its major ‘win at all costs’ offensive. Over the next two days, the 5th and 3rd Armies fought to hold back the German advance. Turmoil existed. Although Cyril’s body was never recovered the official records give the date of his death as the 23rd March 1918, the last day of the Battle of St. Quentin.



The Arras Memorial. (Panel 7 is situated to the right of the central arch).

Cyril’s name appears on Panel 7 of the Arras Memorial in the Faubourg-d’Amiens Cemetery, Pas de Calais, on the Roll of Honour for the Dead, St. Peter’s Church, Wellesbourne and on the village War Memorial. He was awarded the British War and Victory medals.

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

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

Other sources: Cyril Kerwood service record (NA, via Ancestry.com)

War Diaries 2nd Bn Sherwood Foresters 1918 (NA, WO/95/1624/4)