

Frank Walter North Fincher.

Lance Corporal, No. 203600, the 2nd Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment.

Frank Walter North Fincher was born in Aldershot, Hampshire in the first half of 1884. He was the eldest of eight children born to John Gazeley Fincher and his wife Catherine. The family lived at 30, Edward Street, Aldershot for a while before moving to 46, Perowne Street. John worked as a Managing Builders Foreman for Martin Wells and Company, a Government Contractor with branches in Lambeth, London and Aldershot. He had worked for 14 years with the company when, seeking new challenges, he signed an agreement on the 23rd December 1897, to purchase, for the sum of £275, the Building and Plumbing business of John Greenway in Ely St. Stratford upon Avon, which had been in his ownership for 30 years.ⁱ

Frank, his parents and siblings took up residence in Arden St, Stratford upon Avon but the business continued to operate from the Ely Street address, but now under the name of J. G. Fincher & Co. In the latter part of 1908 Frank married Georgina Ada Ellis who originated from Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire. It was inevitable that Frank would join the company and it was around 1910 that the couple left their Shottery home and moved to a property, The Orchard in Bridge St. Wellesbourne, where Frank would manage a branch of his father's business.



Before leaving Stratford he was involved with the Stratford Rifle Club serving as Club Secretaryⁱⁱ and receiving the N.R.A. Rifleman's certificate presented at the annual Club Dinner on 2nd October 1909ⁱⁱⁱ.

Arriving in Wellesbourne, Frank immediately became involved in the life of the village. He served on various committees including that of the Working Men's Conservative Club^{iv} and the Wellesbourne and Walton Horticultural Society^v. He was elected sidesman at St. Peter's Church and served on a sub-committee to raise funds for the restoration of that building^{vi}.

In 1910 he joined the Stratford Swan of Avon Lodge of the Freemasons and as the autumn of 1913 approached Frank's wife Georgina, gave birth to a son which they called John.

In August 1914, at the start of the Great War the British Army was still comprised of volunteers. Frank though, continued to work in the family business. As the war progressed however, it became necessary, at the start of 1916, to introduce a programme of conscription and so Frank received his call up papers. As part of an appeals procedure, his father appeared before the Stratford upon Avon War Court on the 11th October of that year, to contest his son's call up on the grounds that two other of his sons and a son in law were already serving in the Army. Eighteen men from his company were also serving and, because of his own failing health, Frank was needed to administer a Government Contract within the district. Frank also appealed on his own behalf. When it was reported that the Government contract would end in March 1917, exemption was confirmed, but only until the 31st March 1917. He

however continued to be a member of the Wellesbourne troop of the Volunteer Training Corps and joined in shooting competitions against other local troops^{vii}.

In the February of 1917 Frank was elected Worshipful Master of the Freemason's^{viii} but had only time to attend three meetings before reporting for Military service at the Stratford upon Avon recruiting office. He was appointed to the 2nd. Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, Private, No. 203600, part of the 22nd Brigade, 7th Division.

From newspaper reports, indications are that Frank arrived in France three months before his death; around June or July. The battalion war diaries record that 12 'other ranks' joined in late June, non in July and a further 325 between the 1st and 13th of August.

On the 8th August the battalion arrived in Blairville in the Pas de Calais where they immediately commenced a series of training exercises before moving to Eeke and then to Staple and Setques for much of the same, plus of course, the odd game of football between teams from the various battalions of the Division.

The Divisional exercise on the 25th and 26th September had much significance. The Battalion War diary records that *'The exercise was to exemplify the task that the Division might have to perform if it was detailed to capture the southern end of the Passchendaele Ridge'*. Field Marshall Douglas Haig's ambitious plan was to ultimately push north to the Belgian coast and force the German Army back into Holland. As a prelude, the British needed to relieve the enemy of the high ground overlooking the Ypres Salient. The capture of the Passchendaele and Klerken Ridges were therefore an early priority. On the 31st July 1917 the Third Battle of Ypres, also to become known as Passchendaele, was set in motion.

On the 4th October the Battalion was held in reserve at Zillebeke Lake and as part of a wider operation around Poelcappelle to the north west of Passchendaele on the 9th, the 22nd Brigade were designated to attack the German positions at Reutel to the south. Although the rain of the previous two days and the mud made conditions intolerable, the enemy was eventually driven from their positions.

For the 2nd Warwicks the result of the operation on the 9th was 60 killed and 263 wounded. On the 10th, Frank Walter Fincher died of his wounds. He was buried at the Menin Road Southern Cemetery, Ypres, Belgium.(Grave III.L.13).

Frank was described by his family and friends as having many qualities of which thoroughness and earnestness being the most conspicuous. He was awarded the Victory and British Medals and is commemorated on the Roll of Honour for the Dead in St, Peter's Church, Wellesbourne, on the war memorials of Wellesbourne and Stratford upon Avon, the Stratford upon Avon Cemetery War Memorial, the Shottery Roll of Honour, the Memorial Screen and Reredos, Holy Trinity Church, Stratford upon Avon.



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

ⁱ National Archives(S on A Shakespeare Centre)DR149/99 (1897)

- ii Leamington Spa Courier 23/3/1916
- iii Leamington Spa Courier 8/10/1909
- iv Leamington Spa Courier 11/11/1910
- v Leamington Spa Courier 28/7/1911
- vi Leamington Spa Courier 25/7/1913
- vii Stratford upon Avon Herald 28/11/1916
- viii Stratford upon Avon Herald 26/10/1917

Sources: War Diary of the 2nd Battalion, the Royal Warwickshire Regiment (NA WO 95/1664)
Paschendaele: the untold story by Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson.
The Story of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment by C.L.Kingsford.
The 7th Division by C.T.Atkinson.
Photo of Grave – Michael Caldwell