

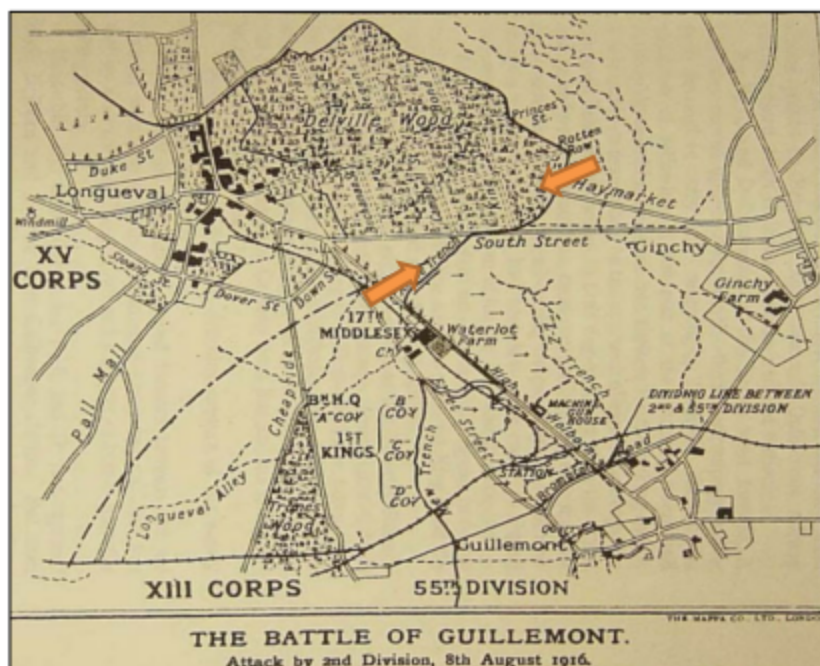
## JOHN BAKER

44

Private 9400, 1<sup>st</sup> Battn (Kings) Liverpool Regiment  
Died on Saturday, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1916, Guillemont, Somme

*"Very misty when attack was launched. Very hard to see more than 10 yards"*

That was the description from the 1<sup>st</sup> Kings Liverpool War Diary for 4.20 a.m. on the morning of August 8<sup>th</sup> 1916 as they launched their attack west of Guillemont through a hail of machine gun bullets from German strongpoints. This, one of the many battles on the Somme, was the second bloody attempt to breach this formidable line during July, August and September of 1916. The heavy mist would have made it almost impossible for the three companies to advance in good order, and a later report from Captain Last (*see copy next page*) that the position "seemed out of hand", but three companies, or the remnants of them, managed to reach their first objective, the German line. Then the mist suddenly lifted, and the situation became dire, the 1<sup>st</sup> Kings decimated and pinned down by machine guns, with German reinforcements cutting them off by advancing along the trenches from Guillemont. Many unsuccessful attempts were made later that and the next day to reach them, but by then John Baker would have been killed, one of the 235 casualties of the Battalion, more than 1 in 5 of their strength. As his name is one of the thousands recorded on Thiepval Memorial, he has no known grave, and his body lies between New Trench, the starting point, and High Holborn, as can be seen on this map :-





The ruins of Guillemont village



The ruins of Guillemont station

Report of Captain LAST, 1st King's.

The situation at the time I was wounded, which I believe to be somewhere about 7 a.m., was as follows:-

About 50 to 70 men were consolidating the STATION.

There were about 150 men consolidating HIGH HOLBORN North West and South East of the Railway.

I cannot say whether we included MACHINE GUN HOUSE in our line as I was unable to identify it.

I understand the left Company (B) pushed towards Z....Z Trench, but could get no definite information.

All Company Officers and several Subalterns were wounded and the position seemed out of hand.

The C.O. and Adjutant, when I was accompanying, endeavouring to reach HIGH HOLBORN from the STATION, were surprised by a large party of Germans; I think we must have lost our way.

We were heavily fired on and took cover in shell holes. I got separated from this party.

As the mist thickened I endeavoured to get back and get in touch with the King's again and took a party forward to look for the C.O., but the mist suddenly lifted and we were fired at from all sides.

The Germans, I think, had made their way back to STRONG POINT and were in position in Communication Trench running between the RAILWAY STATION and BRIMPTON ROAD. Their Machine Guns were very active, and I estimate that there were at least six in action, and they were bombing their way down their original front line and had reached a point about 20 yards North of the RAILWAY.

It seemed to me that any men holding the STATION and HOLBORN must have been cut off.

John Baker's father, also a John, was born at Northchapel, in Sussex, but his mother Rhoda was the daughter of James Collyer, a Pirbright-born gravedigger at Brookwood Cemetery. John Baker senior and Rhoda may have met when her recently widowed mother, to make ends meet, took him as a lodger in their cottage at Lawfords, near Fox Corner and in 1881, a year after Rhoda's father's death, they married. As he was a bricklayer, he had to move where the work was, so John, the eldest child, was born at Knaphill in 1883, and his one brother and seven sisters variously at Stoke, Woking, Knaphill again and Worplesdon. However, by 1897 the family had moved into Lord Pirbright's newly-built 4 Pirbright Cottages at Fox Corner. The 1901 census shows the two parents and nine children, which would have been quite a squeeze, the 18 year old John junior being shown then as a builder's labourer.

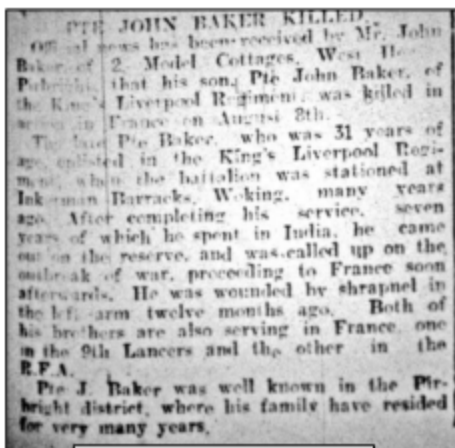


Model Cottages, Vapery Lane

In 1905 his mother died in the Royal Surrey County Hospital, and in 1911 the family moved to 2 Model Cottages in Vapery Lane, next to William and Emily Oliver and their young son at no.1. These were built by Esdor David (Ned) Faggetter of Brookwood and it is quite likely that,

being in the building trade, both Johns would have worked for him, but by the 1911 census John junior had enlisted in the Kings Regiment. His service record cannot be found, and was probably one of the many destroyed by bombing in the second World War, so it has not been possible to find any more of his service history apart from these brief newspaper details :-

Samuel, his younger brother, who served from 1906 to 1913 as a regular soldier in the 9<sup>th</sup> Lancers, survived the war, thanks to a posting to Basra in Iraq. He married Alice, the widow of Arthur Edward Sayers (*see his biography p.25*) in 1920 and they continued to live with his father at Model Cottages until 1952, when John died at the ripe old age of 94. Samuel and Alice both died the following year.



Woking News and Mail, 22<sup>nd</sup>  
September 1916