

JOSEPH HARWOOD

Private T/202483, 1/4th Bn, The Queens (Royal West Surrey) Regiment

Died 14th June 1917, Tank, India, age 36

Joseph was born in 1880, the youngest of 6 children. Father James, an agricultural labourer, born at Cove, had come to Pirbright with wife Elizabeth in the mid-1860s to work for James Hawkins at Cowshot Farm, where the children were all born and where the family were living in the 1881 census. In 1884 they moved to 5 West Heath, when James probably went to work for Sarah Thompson at Wickhams Farm and here at least some of the family would live for almost 40 years.

Admitted to Pirbright School as 'Josh' in 1885, he left 7 years later, not yet 12 years old, but what happened to him for the next 16 years is a mystery, as he cannot be traced in the 1901 census, nor does a service record survive if he fought in the Boer War. He may have moved to Kent, as he married Lucy Edith Taylor there in 1908. She was born at Herne Bay in 1883 and was a housemaid at a school in the county in 1901. The couple returned to West Heath, Pirbright, as the previous year his mother Elizabeth had died and in 1911 widowed father James was living with them as well as their first child, Joseph George, age 1, who was to die later that year. Two more sons would follow, Hubert James in 1911, who died age 2 and William Ernest in 1913. Joseph, their father, was a 'Horseman at a golf club'.

It was probable that Joseph was called up in mid-1916 under the Derby Scheme and, being a family man with children, avoided being sent to the Western Front. Therefore he was posted to the 1/4th Battalion of the Queens and sent to India. In the middle of May 1917, the battalion, 750 strong, left Lahore in modern-day Pakistan for Tank on the Afghan border, as unstable & unhealthy a spot then as it is now. Once they arrived, sickness increased alarmingly – malaria, sand-fly fever and heatstroke (shade temperature 49^oc, 120^of), so that by the time they should have left for action on June 12th, only 350 other ranks were fit enough to leave and 100 more of these were left at stations en route to the cooler hills. One of these may have been Joseph, not yet acclimatised to the heat.

Lucy would have been sent Josh's Victory and British medals, but it would appear from the Medal Index Card that, no doubt still bitter at her husband's death, she returned them. After her father-in-law James Harwood died in 1920, two years later she remarried Percival Kirby, the nurseryman. They lived at West Heath until 1929, then moved to Alfold, where she died in 1948.

