

HENRY HAWTING

Pte 7783 5th Batt. Royal Berks. Died of wounds 17 Jan 1917

Henry Ernest Hawting was born 18th December 1884 in Rokemarsh, **Benson**, the elder of two sons of George & Emma Hawting. George was a hurdlemaker and had lived in Roke/Rokemarsh all his life, marrying Emma in 1882 and having a second son – Alfred – in 1889. The family lived next door to George's elder brother Luke, who was also an agricultural worker on a local farm. The Hawtings were very much a local family, with Henry's grandfather Charles and great-grandfather Stephen also hailing from Roke.

In 1901, Henry aged 16 was living at home and worked on a farm, but times must have been hard since his Mother now took in laundry to help make ends meet. Clearly Henry had other plans, since by 1911 he was in the Army serving in India with the 2nd Battalion Royal Berkshire Regt.

When war broke out in August 1914, the 2nd Royal Berks were recalled from India, reaching England on 22nd October and landing in France as part of 8 Div. on 5th November 1914. They were much needed since the British Expeditionary Force had taken heavy losses at Mons & Le Cateau. The 8th Division were immediately flung into the front line near Messines, to the south of Ypres.

Henry seems to have been wounded very soon after arriving at the front, since he is on a casualty list on 22nd November. At some time after recuperating, he was transferred to the 5th Battalion R Berks, a New Army regiment of Kitchener's men – keen but lacking in experience. A fully trained regular such as Henry would have been very welcome in their ranks.

The 5th Battalion arrived in France on 31st May 1915 and saw action later that year in the Battle of Loos. During the winter that followed the 5th Battalion spent periods of time in the trenches, mainly near Festubert just south of Neuve Chapelle. Although there were no major attacks, life in the trenches was always dangerous, and in the month between 12th Dec and 18th Jan the Division lost hundreds of men.

On 14th Jan and 17th Jan the Berkshires carried out local raids on the German lines and enemy artillery fire caused heavy casualties. One of these casualties was Henry Hawting, who died of his wounds on 17th January. He is buried in Bethune Town Cemetery.