

Lest we Forget – Charles Stewart Stevenson

We continue with our occasional articles on those who lost their lives in military service during World War 1 and are remembered on our War Memorial in the grounds of St Mary's.

A father who was a sergeant in the Artillery and took his family to India, China and Malaya might have been a key influence on young Charles' chosen path in later life. However after the death of his father, Charles (aged 7) came to Wick in 1891 with his mother, two sisters and younger brother to live with their maternal grandfather.

His grandfather, William Edgington, was the sub postmaster of the village living and working out of Ryall's Place, (In later years Charles's mother, Martha, took on the role of sub-postmistress and she would eventually hand this job down to her daughter Maggie.) Thanks to Laurie Clifton-Crick's great collection of photographs of Wick, we have the following picture of the sub Post Office thought to have been taken in the early 1900s.



After he finished school, Charles was apprenticed for five years in the ironmongery business of Mr C H Field of Pershore before leaving the area to join another ironmongers over in Ingastone, Essex. At the age of 22 Charles decided that this trade was not for him and enlisted in the 2nd Essex Regiment in 1905.

It sounds as if military life suited Charles and over the years he earned his sergeant's stripes. Then war was declared in 1914 and very quickly Charles and his comrades found themselves in action in France. The following passage taken from the local paper gives a very detailed and stark account of what then occurred to Charles:

Evesham Journal – 5th December 1914 DEATH OF SERGEANT CHARLES STEVENSON



"Sergeant Charles Stevenson, fourth son of Mr & Mrs T H Stevenson of Wick Post Office, near Pershore was recently killed in action. The sad intelligence was tersely transmitted to the parents from the War Office accompanied by Lord Kitchener's black edged letter expressing the sympathy of the King and Queen. The place where he met his death was not stated.

Sergeant Stevenson, who was in the 2nd Essex Regiment, 12th Infantry 5th Division commonly known as "Pompadors" had come unscathed through several of the hottest engagements of this great war. His last letter to his Mother, received not so many days before the news came of his death, said "We are billeted in a small village after the worst day we had since we came out. Luckily, very luckily, I have again escaped being hit. Nearly all my platoon got killed or wounded in the last fight. I only have 16 men left out of 45. My officer got killed. The Germans tried to break through but we stopped 'em."

The tone of the whole letter was in contrast to previous ones in which he wrote light-heartedly and jokingly. This was written just following a fierce struggle to which he alluded and it was evident he was depressed by the loss of so many of his comrades.

From the second despatch of General Sir John French it is clear that the regiment in which Charlie Stevenson was sergeant was engaged in that memorable fight at the wood of Compaigne in the retreat from Mons where the famous Prussian Guards, the pride of the German Army, were shattered and decimated in their vain attempts to overpower the "thin red line" of the British Infantry. "

Military records disclose that Charles was killed in Action on 31st October 1914 and his body was buried in Ration Farm Military Cemetery, La Chapelle-D'Armentieres, France.