

GEORGE HAWKES

Private

"C" Coy. 1st Bn. Leicestershire Regiment

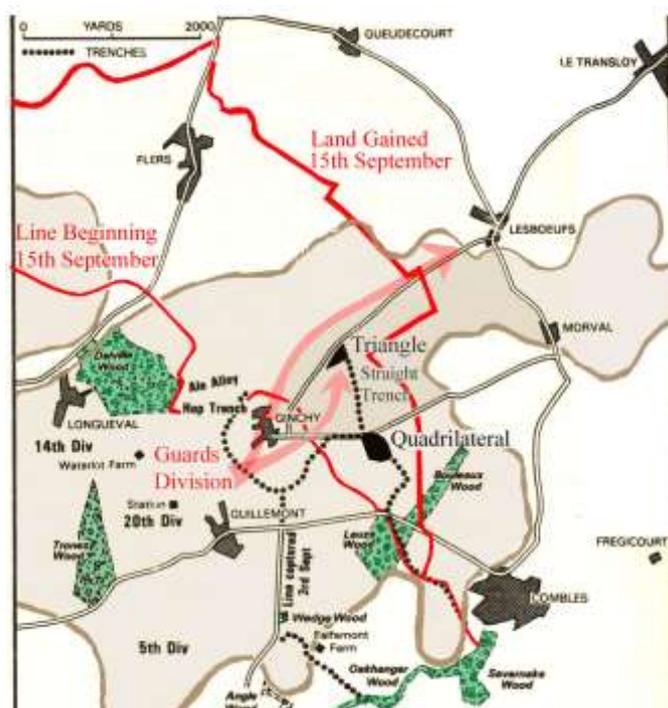
Service No: 9659

Died 15 September 1916, killed in action aged 21

George Hawkes was the fourth son of William James Hawkes (b 15 Sep 1862) and his wife Sarah Elizabeth Hawkes (b 4 Jan 1865) (nee Wigmore); they had been married in 1886 bringing two large local families together. George was baptised on 2 December 1894 and his birth registered at Bradfield in the last quarter of that year. He appears in the 1901 census aged 6 years living with his parents William J, aged 38 years and Sarah Elizabeth Hawkes, 35 in Beenham, together with siblings Frederick 13, William 11, James 10, Alice E 9, Julia 8, Harry 2 and Lottie 30 months. With the exception of Harry, all were born in Beenham. George's father was a bricklayer.

10 years on in the 1911 census, George 16, is still living with his parents now on The Green, Beenham with William 21, Harry 11, Lottie 10 and Edith 6. George's father is described as a bricklayer on his own account whilst William and George are labourers. Interestingly by this time William James and Sarah Elizabeth had had 12 children but 4 had died (inc. a Margaret and Julia) leaving 8 surviving children.

At some point George enlisted in Reading but into what regiment is not known. Certainly at the time he was killed he was in the 1st Bn. Leicestershire Regiment. It was not unusual for men to be transferred particularly if their Regiment had suffered a catastrophic number of casualties.



The Leicestershire Regiment were called the "Tigers" because the cap badge bore the "Royal Bengal Tiger" which had been awarded to the Regiment for service in India. In 1916 they were very much part of the ongoing Battle of the Somme and on 14 September were in front line South-East of Ginchy. The following day they were tasked with taking "Straight Trench" which ran between the heavily fortified positions known as "The Triangle" and "The Quadrilateral". An official history of the Division reported "At the top of the spur, just south of the railway and communicating with the sunken road, was a four-sided trench in

the form of a parallelogram of some 300 yards by 150 yards, called by us the Quadrilateral. The situation was undefined, and the exact positions of the Quadrilateral and other trenches were not known. Even our own positions were in doubt, as almost every vestige of roads, railways and even villages had disappeared under the continuous bombardments. The 15th September was the first occasion on which tanks were employed, and as far as the Division was concerned was a failure,

for of the three allotted to the 6th Division two broke down before starting, and the third, moving off in accordance with orders long before the infantry, had its periscope shot off, its peep-holes blinded, was riddled by armour-piercing bullets, and had to come back without achieving anything. To facilitate the movement of the tanks a gap of about 200 yards had been left in the creeping barrage. This gap unfortunately coincided with the strongest point of the Quadrilateral. The barrage, moreover, had passed over the German trenches by the time the infantry advanced the latter had, consequently, to attack up the glacis-like slopes without any artillery support except the bombardment. This, owing to the enemy's trenches not having been accurately located, was ineffective. The 1st Leicesters and the Norfolks, passing through the entrenched Foresters and Suffolks, attacked the Quadrilateral from the north-west with equal drive, but they too failed. Some ground, however, was made, and by 10 a.m. the 16th Infantry Brigade on the south, and the 71st Infantry Brigade on the north, were digging in close to the enemy's wire and trenches".

At some point during this attack, George Hawkes was killed but the conditions were such that his body was never found and he is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial, Pier and Face 2 C and 3 A along with 71,000 other men who have no known grave. He was awarded the Victory & British War medals.

What became of George's family is not clear. His brother Frederick had married Alice Amelia Webb in 1910 and his sister Alice E married Arthur A Flegg in 1918. Lottie Hawkes married Robert H Butler in 1920. In 1939 both his father William J and mother Sarah were still alive and living in Beenham.