

PRIVATE SIDNEY CHARLES FOXON 41954

1/5(London) Field Ambulance
Royal Army Medical Corps (Territorial)
Killed in action Friday 18th January 1918, Age
24
Rocquigny-Equancourt Road, British Cemetery,
Manancourt, France
Plot 10 Row B Grave 15
Son of James and Catherine Foxon
15 Sketchley Rd, Burbage
Burbage War memorial
Wesleyan Methodist memorial.
Family gravestone St Catherine's Churchyard



Sidney was the second of seven children of James and Catherine Foxon, born in Burbage probably on Church Street. The family had by 1911 moved to Sketchley Rd, the end house in the row named Nursery View, (the properties overlooked The Burbage Nurseries, owned by the Hurst Family). He may have been educated at the Wesleyan School as the Foxon family were associated with the chapel on nearby Windsor Street.



Nursery View, 15 Sketchley

By the age of 17, he was working in boot manufacturing as a shoe operative, the same occupation as his father and elder brother James. Before enlisting, he was employed at Ney Bros. Boot manufacturers at Barwell.

In September 1915 one year after the outbreak of war, Sidney enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC). After training at Catterick Bridge he was posted to France in July 1916 at the start of the war on the Somme. His unit, the 1st/5th London Field Ambulance, were based near enemy lines in the Somme.



RAMC Cap Badge



Field Ambulance

It was here the enemies defences were the strongest, and casualties were high. 60,000 men were killed, wounded or missing on the first day of fighting on the Somme (1st July 1916), the worst single day in the history of the British Army.

The Royal Army Medical Corps was the unit providing the non-combatants who staffed the various stages of the chain that handled the evacuation and treatment of a casualty. Some of the corps consisted of men who would not fight for religious reasons such as the Quakers. This would often be very dangerous job-rescuing casualties from the combat zone. Men with any medical experience such as members of the St Johns Ambulance were often recruited to the Corps.

In June 1917 he was wounded in France and when recovered was sent to the RAMC depot in Blackpool. Here it was found his wound had not healed properly and after being x-rayed in Manchester it was found a piece of wood was embedded in his face. After an operation, he fully recovered and was sent back to France on Christmas Eve 1917.

The Somme had heavy autumn rains and the land became a freezing quagmire of squelching mud some 2 feet deep. The heavy snowfalls and freezing temperatures of the winter months turned the mud into an impenetrable mass of frozen ground, further worsening the German bombardment of the allied positions. In coming German shells hit the deeply frozen ground with added force, their blast spreading over a wider and more deadly area.

On the 18th January 1918, and under such conditions, a bursting German shell killed Sidney instantly. He was 24 years of age. He was buried two days later alongside a comrade Pte William Cornwell who fell at the same time, and is remembered with honour on grave X.B.15 at Rocquigny-Equancourt Road British Cemetery, Manancourt, and Somme.



Rocquigny-Equancourt Road British Cemetery, Manancourt

The company is Chaplin E Wilkinson who spoke of him as a good soldier and a brave man who could not have done his duty better and given his life in a better cause notified his parents of his death.

In a letter to his parents from his employers Ney Bros of Barwell wrote, "We wish to assure you and all the members of your family of our sincere sympathy with you in this great trial. Your late son was one of our best and most respected employees, and gained the esteem of his fellow men as well as ourselves by his genial disposition and earnest attention to his duty. It seems only a short time since the writer was speaking to him, and now he is resting peacefully with many of his brave comrades. This sad bereavement seems doubly hard when we consider the bright prospects he had before him, for we feel he would have made great headway had he been spared.

Judging by his everyday genial disposition, we feel sure that he was a loyal son and a very great comfort to your family. We do trust that in this dark season of trouble you will be able to see the brighter side of all, and realise that your dear son is enjoying the rest that alone remains to the people of God. He was truly a good man, and will be greatly missed, we feel sure by all those with whom he came into contact. Your letter was read to his fellow workers on Saturday, and they are expressing their sympathy with you in another letter. We can ill afford to lose such characters as that which was represented in your late son, but we feel their memory will live long in many many minds and we trust their example will be followed”.

When news of Sidney’s death arrived in Burbage, his brother was home on leave from the trenches and another was shortly expecting to leave England on active service. One of these brothers was Ernest who is also commemorated on the Burbage War memorial.

ERNEST EDWARD FOXON 458279

Royal Engineers

Died from effects of serving his country.

18th November 1920

Age 22

Burbage War memorial

Family gravestone St Catherine’s Churchyard ref-New ground 2 plot 55

Ernest Foxon was the younger brother of Sidney and third child of James and Catherine Foxon. He was born in Burbage in 1899. Age 18 in 1917, he would have enlisted by this time and served as a sapper with the Royal Engineers.

Ernest survived the war and returned home to Sketchley Road a broken man and two years after the Armistice in 1920 he died on the 18th November 1920.

As part of the criteria established by the memorial committee Earnests name was rightfully included in the east panel in memory of the men who died from the effects of the Great War.

The Family’s other two sons Arthur and James survived the war and father James lived to be one of the oldest surviving men in the village dying in the 1950’s.



Earnest and Sidney Foxon's Grave, St Catherine's Churchyard