

Hammond, JG

At the 1891 Census, the family of William Henry Hammond (45), a blacksmith, and his wife Sarah Elizabeth(43) were living at 3 Bond Terrace, Chiswick, in the parish of St Michael and All Angels Church. They had both been born in Chiswick. The children were: William, aged 20, a general labourer, born in Fulham; Barbara (16), born Battersea; Annie (10) and John George(6), both scholars; and Harry (4) and Fanny aged 1. Also in the house was George Hammond (87) a retired blacksmith, from Norfolk, the Grandfather.

John George, born 15 May 1885, was baptised by Rev. Wilson at St Michael's on 5 June 1885. The family at that time lived at 51 Windmill Place.

John married Florence Mary formerly Cairns in about 1909. She had been born also about 1885, and originally came from Newcastle. In 1911, they were living at 35 Reckitt Road, with his step-children, James (5), and Norman (3) from Florence's first marriage. They had been born in Ealing and Acton respectively. John worked as a farm labourer, and Florence was a laundress. John and Florence also had a child together, but it had died in infancy just before the date of the census.

It is not clear at what time John had enlisted in the Army, but very probably towards the beginning of 1916. The medal card does not indicate when he served in France, but in any event he was not entitled to a 1915 Star. He enlisted in the 12th Battalion, the Middlesex Regiment (the Diehards).

The 12th Battalion, Middlesex Regiment first embarked for France in July 1915. It had fairly routine front line duty until the start of the Battle of the Somme in 1st July 1916. In reserve at Carnoy at the outset, its first major action was at Trones Wood two weeks later, where fierce fighting was successful at the cost of nearly 300 casualties. It is not

possible to say whether John Hammond was present at that time, but he was almost certainly involved in the next major engagement – the Battle of Thiepval Ridge on 26 September. It was another fierce struggle, “practically every yard of ground being fought for”. The battalion gained two VCs within the “Other Ranks” in the process but at a cost of another 432 casualties. It is possible that John was among the missing at the time, but is more likely he survived until the unit was to briefly attack the disputed Regina Trench NE of Thiepval on 25 October. There was a huge enemy barrage at the time when they were moving up.

In any event, John George Hammond’s body was never recovered from the battlefield. He is commemorated at the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing, and his official date of death is recorded as being on 24 October 1916.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission states that John’s next of kin were his wife, who after the war had re-married to become Florence Cocking, and living in Dover. When the memorial was completed, his mother Sarah had died. Nothing is known about his siblings, or his step-children.