

Private George James Birchmore

Regimental number: 3106

9th Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment

born: 16 December 1894 - died: 24 April 1916

Private George James Birchmore was born on 16 December 1894 in Wimbledon, Surrey, England and baptised at Holy Trinity Church on 10 March 1895.¹ He was the son of William and Sarah Birchmore of 32 Victory Road, Wimbledon. His father, William, was born in about 1864 in Wandsworth, Surrey, the son of George Birchmore, a shopkeeper.² His mother, the former Sarah Maria Balsham Norris, was born in about 1862 in New Malton, Surrey, the daughter of James Norris, a gardener.³ They were married at Christ Church, New Malden and Coombe, on 13 December 1888.⁴

William and Sarah had nine children, all of whom survived childhood.⁵ There were seven sons – Ernest (born in about 1890), Walter (born in about 1891), Frederick (born in about 1893), George, Harold (born in about 1899), Edward (born in about 1903) and Charles (born in about 1905) – and two daughters – Harriett (born in about 1897) and Rosa (born in about 1902).⁶

In the late 1890s, the family moved to Rudgwick in Sussex.⁷ When he was married and until at least 1891, George's father, William, was a cab proprietor. On 31 March 1901, he was at the home of his brother at 70 Dundonald Road in Wimbledon, where he was listed as a farmer, working for himself. The rest of the family was living 30 miles away at Haven, Horsham, which was between Rudgwick and Billingshurst. In 1911, William was once again with the family and living at the Haven, Billingshurst, Horsham. He was then a baker, as was his son, Ernest.⁸ Birchmore & Son were listed in the Kelly's Directory in 1911.⁹

George enlisted in the 9th Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment in Horsham.¹⁰ The 9th Battalion was a Service Battalion, formed at Chichester in September 1914 as part of Kitchener's New Army.¹¹ The Battalion was camped initially on the South Downs, near Brighton. It became part of the 73rd Brigade of 24th Division. In December 1914, it moved to Portslade and then, in April 1915, to Shoreham and in June 1915, to Woking in Surrey in final preparation for joining the British Expeditionary Force in France. George landed with the Battalion in Boulogne, France on 31 August 1915. Within weeks of landing, the Battalion took part in the Battle of Loos, where it suffered heavy losses.

In April 1916, the 9th Battalion was stationed in Kortepyp – a small village near West-Vlaanderen in Belgium.¹² The Battalion's war diaries record the 24 April and the days leading up to it as quiet days.¹³ However, they probably were not quiet for George, who died at the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 24 April as a result of a wound to his back.¹⁴ The day that he died, one patient was reported to have died at the 1st CCCS¹⁵ – perhaps it was George. The 1st CCCS had been attacked by German taubes¹⁶ during the day, damaging and destroying motor ambulances and tearing holes in tents occupied by patients. A total of 45 patients died at the 1st CCCS in April 1916.

George was a member of the Church of England. He was buried in the Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord (Plot II, Row D, Grave 162).¹⁷ Bailleul is in France, close to the Belgian border. It was occupied on 14 October 1914 and became an important railhead, air depot and hospital centre. Several Casualty Clearing Stations, including the 1st Canadian, were quartered there for considerable periods. The earliest Commonwealth burials at Bailleul were made in April 1915. An

extension was built and burials continued until April 1918, and occurred again in September and after the Armistice, when graves were brought in from the neighbouring battlefields.¹⁸

A letter was sent to his mother to notify him of his death and she received the monies owing to him from the army after his death.¹⁹ He has prepared a will in favour of his mother.²⁰

George was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914-15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).²¹ He is commemorated on a website honouring the men of Rudgwick, a town just west of Horsham, who died in the two world wars.²²

George's three brothers – Frederick, Harold and Walter – all served in, but survived, the Great War.²³ Frederick was a Private in the Royal Army Medical Corps and then transferred to 2/18th Battalion of the London Regiment. He was wounded in action in France – initially with a gunshot wound to his left knee and then with a gunshot wound to his back. He then served in Egypt, where he transferred to the Royal Irish Fusiliers. Harold was a Private in the 1st Battalion of the Bedford Regiment²⁴ and was injured and spent a long time in hospital.²⁵ Walter was a Private in the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment.²⁶

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¹ "England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975," Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 14 July 2015), entry for George James Birchmore, FHL Film Number: 2262177, Reference ID: item 1-3 p 201

² "1891 England Census," Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 14 July 2015), entry for William Birchmore, Registration district: Kingston, ED, institution, or vessel: 7, Piece: 606, Folio: 73, Page Number: 35; "Surrey, England, Marriages, 1754-1937," Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 14 July 2015), entry for William Birchmore, Reference Number: 3965/1/11

³ Ibid.

⁴ "Surrey, England, Marriages, 1754-1937," entry for William Birchmore

⁵ "1911 England Census," Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 14 July 2015), entry for George Birchmore, Registration district: Horsham, Registration District Number: 81, Sub-registration district: West Horsham, ED, institution, or vessel: 4, Household schedule number: 42, Piece: 5278

⁶ "1901 England Census," Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 14 July 2015), entry for George Birchmore, Registration district: Horsham, Sub-registration district: West Horsham, ED, institution, or vessel: 4, Piece: 952, Folio: 59, Page Number: 15, Household schedule number: 99; "1911 England Census," entry for George Birchmore

⁷ Family source

⁸ "1911 England Census," entry for George Birchmore

⁹ "Kelly's Directory Sussex 1911," University of Leicester, Special Collections Online (<http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/cdm/ref/collection/p16445coll4/id/339970> ; accessed 14 August 2015), entry for Birchmore

¹⁰ "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919," Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 14 July 2015), entry for George James Birchmore

¹¹ "9th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment" (<http://battlefields1418.50megs.com/9sussex.htm>; accessed 20 July 2015)

¹² "UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914-1920," Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 20 July 2015) Regiment or Unit: Royal Sussex Regiment, Sub Unit: 9th Battalion, Division: 24th Division, Diary Dates: 1915 Aug - 1919 May, Piece Description: Piece 2219/2: 9 Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment (1915 Aug - 1919 May)

Piece Number: 2219

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," *Library and Archives Canada*, (records accessed 2013 & 2015), Record Group 9, series IIC10, volume 4556, Record number 58

¹⁵ "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FIN&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G; accessed 17 June 2015)

¹⁶ The "taube" was a World War I German military airplane. "Etrich Taube," Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.com; accessed 14 August 2015)

¹⁷ Commonwealth War Graves Commission," (www.cwgc.org; accessed 22 June 2015), entry for Birchmore, G. J.

¹⁸ "Bailleul Communal Cemetery, Nord," Commonwealth War Graves Commission (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2000047/Bailleul%20Communal%20Cemetery.%20Nord>; accessed 17 June 2015)

¹⁹ "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 14 July 2015), entry for George James Birchmore

²⁰ England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 14 July 2015), entry for George James Birchmore

²¹ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 14 July 2015), entry for George J. Birchmore

²² "George James Birchmore," Rudgwick Remembers: A Sussex Village's Tribute to its Fallen of the Two World Wars (<http://www.rudgwickremembers.com>; accessed 20 July 2015)

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Family source

²⁶ "George James Birchmore," Rudgwick Remembers: A Sussex Village's Tribute to its Fallen of the Two World Wars