

Private Samuel Bertrem (Bert) Clewlow

Regimental number: 8390

1st Battalion, North Staffordshire (Prince of Wales's) Regiment

born: about 1896 - died: 30 April 1916

Private Samuel Bertrem (Bert) Clewlow was born in about 1896 in Newcastle, Staffordshire, the son of William and Mary Ellen Clewlow.¹ His father, William Henry, was born in about 1859 in Tunstall, Staffordshire, the son of William Clewlow. His mother, the former Mary Ellen Harding Hughes, was born in about 1865 in Cobridge Hanley in Staffordshire, the daughter of William Harding Hughes.² Later Mary Ellen appears to have been adopted by William E. (an innkeeper) and Emilia Owen.³

William Henry and Mary Ellen married on 7 February 1881 in the parish church of St George's Newcastle-under-Lyme. When he was married, William was a forgerman. A few months after their marriage, William and Mary Ellen were living with the Owens at Boundary Inn, 38 George Street in Newcastle-under-Lyme.⁴ They had twelve children, eight of whom survived to 1911.⁵ Eight of the twelve children have been identified: Lilly (born in about 1884), William (born in about 1886), Sarah Annie (born in about 1890), Samuel Bertrem, Emily (born in about 1898), Thomas Albert (born in about 1900), John (born in about 1903), and Mary Ellen (born in about 1907).⁶

In 1911, the family was living at 59 York Street in Basford, near Stoke-upon-Trent where Bert's father, William, was a labourer in a brewery. Bert's sister, Sarah Annie had married Henry Heeks in 1910.⁷ The couple and their son, William Henry Heeks (age 1), were living with the Clewlovs.⁸

Bert enlisted as a Private in the North Staffordshire Regiment in Stoke-on-Trent. His medal rolls index card suggests that he served in the Balkans prior to 1 January 1916.⁹ However, the 1st Battalion of the North Staffordshire Regiment served in France from September 1914 until November 1918.¹⁰

In April 1916, the 1st Battalion was stationed north of Wulverghem, Belgium.¹¹ At 12.55 a.m. on 30 April a gas alarm was given. There was one wave of gas, probably chlorine, which lasted about 20 minutes. With winds blowing 10 miles per hour, the gas covered about 50 metres in eleven seconds. That did not give the men much time to adjust their helmets and a large portion of the men were gassed. At 1.20 a.m. a German attack began. There was considerable confusion because of the suddenness of the attack and the fact that the men were still wearing their smoke helmets and, as a result, were partially blinded. Although the Battalion had to evacuate the area, the enemy was not able to advance and much of the area was reoccupied. A shortage of bombs prevented anything more than a steady advance of the Battalion and the enemy was able to return to its own lines. The enemy had taken one man prisoner and killed or wounded a dozen more men. "Our losses from gas-poisoning were considerable chiefly owing to the speed with which the gas travelled over the short distance between the trenches. Smoke helmets when adjusted properly in time proved most effective. A large number of men suffered from after-effects being taken ill 12 to 24 hours after the gas had passed. Most of their cases, however, were only slight."¹²

Unfortunately this was not the case for Bert. He died of gas poisoning on 30 April 1916 at the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station.¹³ Fifteen patients died at the 1st CCCS the same day as Bert, many from gas poisoning.¹⁴ In April and June 1916, the 1st Battalion suffered well over 500 casualties in two serious gas attacks, while in the trenches north of Wulverghem.¹⁵ Bert lost four comrades from his battalion in the few days at the end of April and beginning of May: Private Oliver

Llewellyn Boon, Private James Morgan, Private George William Burrows and Private Thomas Alfred Hulme. Most of his comrades had been poisoned by chlorine gas.

He was a member of the Church of England¹⁶ and was buried in the Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord (Plot II, Row D, Grave 137).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, who was then living at 30 Victoria Street in Basford, to notify her of Bert's death.¹⁹ She also received the monies owing to him from the army after his death.²⁰

Bert 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

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¹ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 5 January 2015), entry for William Henry Clewlow, Registration district: Stoke upon Trent, Registration District Number: 361, Sub-registration district: Stoke upon Trent, ED, institution, or vessel: 3, Household schedule number: 74, Piece: 16551

² "Staffordshire marriages," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 5 August 2015), entry for William Henry Clewlow

³ "1881 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 January 2015), entry for William E. Owen, Registration district: Newcastle Under Lyme, ED, institution, or vessel: 8, Piece: 2699, Folio: 39, Page Number: 22

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ "1911 England Census," entry for William Henry Clewlow

⁶ "1901 England, Wales & Scotland Census," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 15 August 2015), entry for William H. Clewlow, Registration district: Newcastle under Lyme, Archive reference: RG13, Piece number: 2579, Folio: 105, Page: 31

"1911 England Census," entry for William Henry Clewlow

⁷ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Marriage Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 15 August 2015), entry for Sarah Clewlow, Registration district: Newcastle under Lyme, Inferred County: Staffordshire, Volume: 6b, Page: 103

⁸ "1911 England Census," entry for William Henry Clewlow

⁹ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 5 August 2015), entry for Bert Clewlow

¹⁰ "North Staffordshire Regiment," Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Staffordshire_Regiment; accessed 16 August 2015)

¹¹ "UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914-1920," , " *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 16 August 2015), Regiment or Unit: Prince of Wales's (North Staffordshire) Regiment, Sub Unit: 1st Battalion, Division: 24th Division, Diary Dates: 1915 Nov - 1919 May, Piece Description: Piece 2213/1: 1 Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment (1915 Nov - 1919 May), Piece Number: 2213

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ "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 63

¹⁴ "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=FINN&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G); accessed 17 June 2015)

¹⁵ "North Staffordshire Regiment"

¹⁶ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Record number 63

¹⁷ "Commonwealth War Graves Commission," (www.cwgc.org; accessed 3 December 2015), entry for Clewlow, Bert, Service No: 8390

¹⁸ "Bailleul Communal Cemetery, Nord," Commonwealth War Graves Commission (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2000047/Bailleul%20Communal%20Cemetery.%20Nord>; accessed 5 August 2015)

¹⁹ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Record number 63

²⁰ "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 5 August 2015), entry for Bert Clewlow

²¹ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," entry for Bert Clewlow