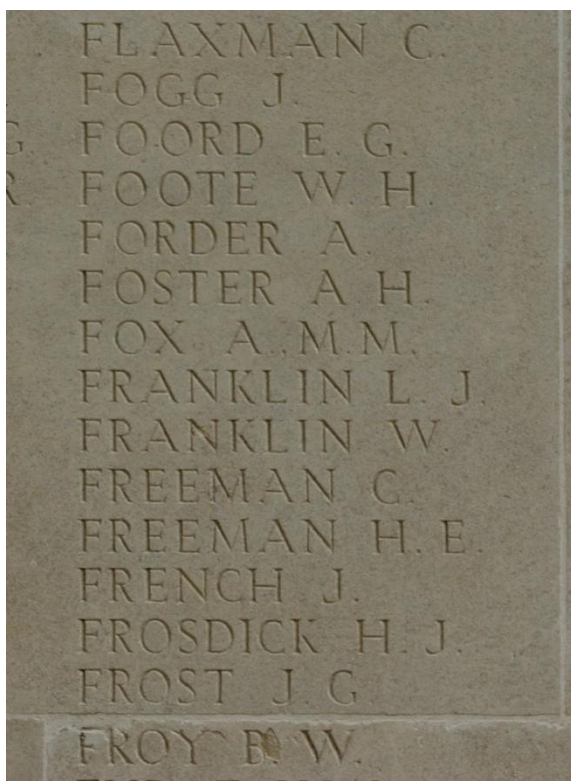


Private Charles Henry Freeman – 8th Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment,
No. 3/7687

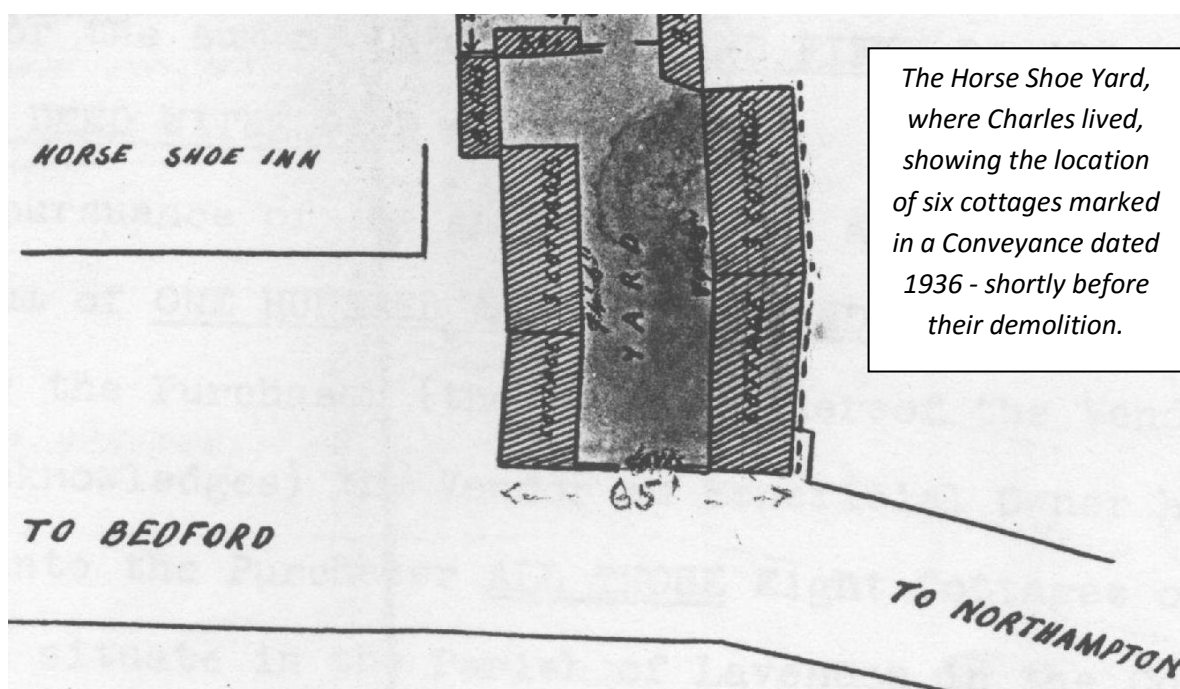


Above: The panel on Face 2C at Thiepval Memorial recording Charles Freeman's death.

Charles Henry Freeman was born on 21 July 1898 at the Horse Shoe Yard, Lavendon, where a number of cottages once stood in the area that is now part of the Village Hall car park. Charles' mother was Lucy Lydia Freeman, a Domestic Servant. The birth certificate for Charles does not include his father's name.

In 1901 Charles was living at the Horse Shoe Yard with his mother Lucy and her parents, Thomas and Elizabeth Freeman. Lucy was a Shoe Lift (heel) Maker. Five of Lucy's brothers and sisters (four of whom also worked in the shoe trade) were likewise living in the same cottage, together with another grandchild, Hilda, a younger sister to Charles. Thus, Charles was not short of several ready-made Aunts and Uncles to amuse both him and his little sister! The youngest included his Uncle Everet, only 12 years older than Charles; sadly both Everet and another uncle, Arthur, were also to perish in the Great War.

By 1911 only Charles, his unmarried Aunt Emily and two other grandchildren were left living with his grandparents, Thomas and Elizabeth. Charles was still at School - only a few yards walk across the road from the Horse Shoe Yard.



Perhaps Charles had remained with his grandparents for the benefit of his schooling, because his mother Lucy had meanwhile married Arthur Hobbs, a Horseman on a Farm, in the summer of 1906. As a result, Lucy had evidently removed herself to Newton Blossomville, where husband Arthur had been born and bred, and where in 1911 they lived together with four of their children, Hilda &

Private Charles Henry Freeman – 8th Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment, No. 3/7687

Arthur Freeman and Rosie & Jane Hobbs. These children, siblings or half-siblings to Charles, were nevertheless all born in Lavendon, probably at the Horse Shoe Yard where her parents still lived.

After his schooling Charles also removed himself from Lavendon to Newton Blossomville; his later military records show his formal residence to have been in that village, presumably where his mother and Arthur were living. No later than mid-1915 when he was age 17, Charles enlisted in the 8th Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment - his medal record shows a qualifying date of 4th October 1915 for when he was awarded the 1914-15 Star.

Interestingly, mother Lucy's new brother-in-Law, George Hobbs, had re-enlisted at the end of 1914 in the 8th Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment having previously served 21 years both in the Regiment and with the Royal Engineers, including 11 years spent in India. George also died in the Great War on 19 December 1915 in Belgium – an occasion when the Germans first made use of Phosgene gas. It is a matter for conjecture as to whether George's service and the earlier death at Ypres of his Uncle Arthur Freeman, both with the Bedfordshires, may have spurred Charles on to enlist in the same Regiment.

The 8th Battalion was formed in October 1914 following Lord Kitchener's call to arms for 100,000 men to join the ranks. It first arrived in France in early October 1915 and served entirely in France and Flanders throughout the war, fighting in every major battle during its active service period. A year later, in late August and early September 1916, the Battalion was once again in training between battles and on 3rd September the men enjoyed the luxury of bathing, the issue of clean underclothes, and a church service. By 11th September the issue of fighting stores was complete and the Battalion moved on into trenches near Guillemont.

On 15th September 1916 the Battalion was ordered to take the Quadrilateral redoubt in the Battle of Fler-Courcelette (part of the overall Somme offensive). An intense artillery barrage in support of the action failed to materialise and the attack failed. There were a great many casualties as a result and it must be presumed that Charles Freeman was one of them on that day at the tender age of 18 years.

For service to his country Charles was awarded the 1914-15 Star, as well as the British War and Victory medals. His name is recorded on the Thiepval Memorial shown below.



From the Commonwealth War Graves Commission:

"The Thiepval Memorial, the Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, bears the names of more than 72,000 officers and men of the United Kingdom and South African forces who died in the Somme sector before 20 March 1918 and have no known grave. Over 90% of those commemorated died between July and November 1916."

13.
WILL.

I in the Event of
my Death I give
the whole of my
effects to
Mr. T. Freeman
C/O. Mrs. A Hobbs
Newton Blossomville
Nr Newport Pagnell
Bucks
England
Signature C. Freeman
Pte. No. 7687
8th Beds. Regt.

Post script:

As noted above, Charles' mother Lucy married Arthur Hobbs whose brother George also died in the War. Both Arthur and George were born in Newton Blossomville. The following was reported in the Bucks Standard of 8th January 1916:

Aged 43, **Private G. Hobbs**, of the 8th Bedfordshire Regiment, was killed in action on December 19th, and is buried at La Brique, Belgium. Before the war he was a pensioner from the Army, having served the full period of 21 years in the Royal Engineers and 3rd Bedfords. This included 11 years of duty in India, which merited such awards as the Indian medal (1895) and the clasp for the relief of Chitral in the same year. He re-enlisted just over twelve months ago, and went to France last September.