



William Horace Wooding was born in Lavendon in early 1898. His father, Horace William Wooding, was a boot and shoe worker who married Elizabeth Drage in 1897. Earlier, in 1881 William's father was living as a child age 6 in the Newport Pagnell Union Workhouse before moving to live with his Grandmother Eliza Chaplain in Castle Road. After their marriage Horace and Elizabeth, together with son William and daughter Edith, were to be found living in Olney Road next door to Albert Boucher who was a Lavendon Blacksmith. It is an irony that William lived within a matter of yards from the War Memorial.

By 1911 William, who was then the eldest child, had gained a brother Joseph and two sisters Maggie and Olive - three other siblings had previously died in infancy and another four siblings, Phyllis, Harold, Harry and Norma were born between 1911 and 1920. In 1911 William was working as an 'Odd (job) Boy at Shoe Factory'. There was a shoe factory two doors along from their home in

Olney Road and this may have been where William was working.

At some point William enlisted in the 5th Battalion of the Oxford & Buckinghamshire Regiment. Given his young age (16 years at the outbreak of war) it could reasonably be assumed that he did not go into action until perhaps age 18 in mid-1916. His medal record shows that he was not entitled to a Star and therefore it would have been at least 1st January 1916 before he would have seen any action.



Above: Olney Road where William and his family lived

In early August 1916 the Battalion moved into the Somme and on 24/25th August it went into battle with other units with the overall aim of clearing the enemy out of Delville Wood; this it succeeded in doing. However, the Battalion sustained 170 casualties during the process, including 44 killed. After a brief period of rest away from the front, the Battalion returned to the Somme for another attack on 15 September, once again in the vicinity of Delville Wood. This resulted in another 30 killed and

120 wounded. The remainder of the year to the end of 1916 was 'quiet and uneventful' with time spent on working parties, training, support and holding trenches in front of Arras.



Above: Brothers Joseph Wooding (1907), Harold (1913) and Harry (1915)

In the first half of 1917 the Battalion took part in two major offensives, the first on the 9th April along a ten mile front from south of Arras to south of Lens when 185 men were lost. The second offensive was in much the same area from 3rd May when another 300 men were lost. After a period of consolidation and training, the Battalion returned to the front line south-west of Ypres on 17th August and there followed some nine days of intensive fighting with the Battalion enduring heavy shelling, machine gunning and gassing with many more losses. At the beginning of September the Battalion moved onwards to regroup at Neuve Eglise a few kilometres north-west of Armentieres. Most of the month was spent relatively quietly providing relief to other units in the trenches, improving trenches and carrying out training & range practice in between times. The Battalion sustained only occasional casualties during this period across the month.

After the intense battle activity involving the Battalion over the previous few months, it is somewhat ironic that it appears William may have been a casualty of sporadic enemy shelling or bombing to the rear of the front line. On 27th September the enemy dropped a bomb on a billet hut killing 6 men and wounding 13 others, and on 29th September

there were three casualties from another bomb. It is very likely therefore that William lost his life either from wounds sustained on the 27th or directly from the hit taken on the 29th September 1917, the date of his death.

William was buried at the Bethlehem Farm West Cemetery which was created by the Australians following their capture of the farm in June 1917. The cemetery was in use until the end of 1917 and includes 165 WW1 servicemen buried there. The majority of burials are Australian soldiers but William is buried there with 6 other members of his battalion, all of whom died between 29th September and 2nd October. William was entitled to the British and Victory medals for his part in the Great War.



Above: Bethleem West Farm Cemetery where Private William Horace Wooding is buried.