

Private William Charles Wright – Somerset Light Infantry, Service No. 50605



William Charles Wright was born in the second quarter of 1899 in Lavendon, probably in the dwelling along the 'Bedford Road' (now the High Street) where his parents were living at the time of the 1901 census. In that year William's father, also named William Charles, was working as a Brick Burner, possibly at the former brickworks in the Harrold Road, closeby to Snelson. William senior and his wife, Mary Anne (Polly) Odell, were both born in Lavendon and married early in 1899.

In 1911 son William was still at school and his father was working as a 'Horseman on a Farm'. The family was living in a house in the former Bell Yard within the grounds of the present day Bell House in the High Street. There were no other children in the marriage by 1911 and so it is likely that the Great War took away the life of an only child for William and Mary.

William enlisted at Aylesbury, probably nearer to the end of the war given his age. He joined the 1st Battalion of Prince Albert's Somerset Light Infantry, Service No. 50605.

By late 1918, a history of the Battalion records that *"For more than four long years the Battalion had been engaged in bitter fighting in France and Belgium: hundreds of brave men had given their lives for their country, many more had received grievous wounds, innumerable acts of daring and gallantry had been performed, and hardships of the most extreme nature had been cheerfully borne"*.¹

On the 1st November 1918, elements of the Battalion were assigned to support the Seaforths and the King's Own in an attack at Preseau, a small village in the Nord Department of northern France. There the Germans were holding the houses in strength and although some progress was made over the day it was necessary for the British positions to be consolidated overnight. A fresh attack early the following morning (2nd November) was ordered. The Battalion's objective was again to support the Seaforths and mop up through the village. The latter task proved difficult as there were many German snipers still hidden in the houses causing frequent casualties.



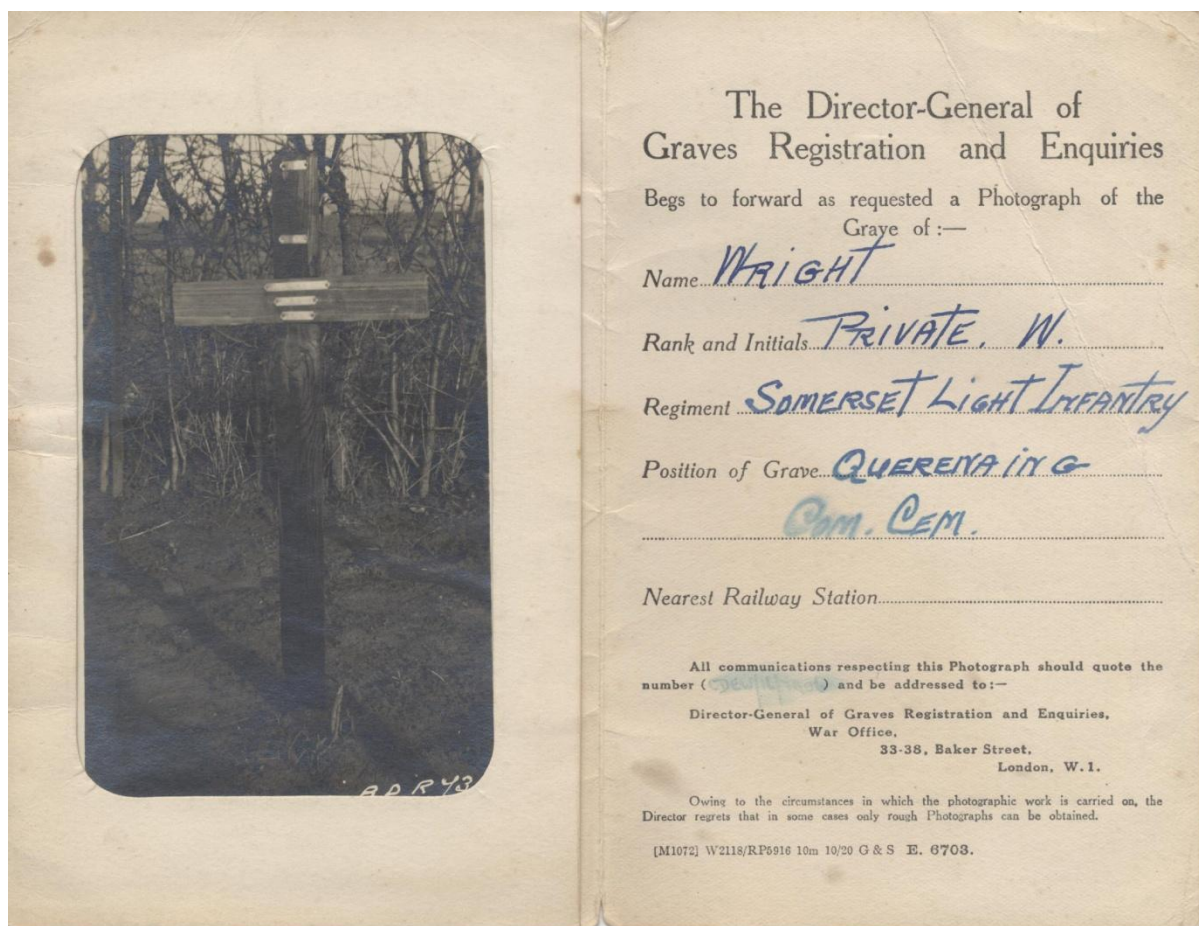
*Silk 'cigarette' Patch
Somerset Light Infantry*

In all some 5 officers and 88 other ranks from the Battalion were killed during these two days of fighting at Preseau. It was the last fight in which the Battalion took part, just 9 days before the

¹ [A History Of The 1st Battalion, The Somerset Light Infantry \(Prince Albert's\) July 1st, 1916, to the End of the War](#)

Armistice on the 11th, and it must be assumed that it was during the second day's fighting at Preseau that William was killed, then aged 19.

William was buried at the nearby Querenaing Cemetery, grave A.5, together with 20 other comrades. Querenaing is a small village 5 kilometres south of Valenciennes. A sad reminder of his family's grief is evident from their request to the Director-General of Graves Registration and Enquiries, to be supplied with a photograph of William's temporary grave marker, as shown below. It is believed that William Wright was the last Lavendon soldier to die in the Great War, just days before its formal end.



For his part in the war, William was awarded the British and Victory medals. His next of kin received the traditional death plaque that was awarded following the loss of any WW1 soldier. The latter, together with William's medals, his portrait and the original photo of his wooden grave marker, is now in the private collection of Nigel Stickells of Lavendon.



Above: Private William Wright's gravestone at Querenaing cemetery, pictured below.

