

## **Benjamin Baker**

1880 - 1917

**Methodist minister's son**

**Educated at University College Oxford**

**Died of wounds inflicted at Scarpe, aged 37, on 16 April 1917**

### **Family and Education**

Benjamin Wood Baker was born between July and September 1880, at Newent, Gloucestershire, where his father Rev William J Baker was a Wesleyan Methodist minister. His mother was called Sarah and he had one brother and two sisters. In 1899 Benjamin began studying at University College Oxford, and at the 1901 census he was living with his parents in Sculcoates, Yorkshire. In 1911 he was with his parents in Tunstall, Staffordshire: he was still described as a student. He married, probably between 1912 and 1915, and his bride Kathleen Mary was living in Billingshurst in Sussex.

### **War Service: 1/5 Battalion (London Rifle Brigade), London Regiment**

Benjamin enlisted in Southend and joined the London Rifle Brigade as a rifleman. His battalion transferred between Divisions several times, but in February 1916 it came under the command of 169th Brigade in 56th (London) Division. The unit began to concentrate in the Hallencourt area and took part in several engagements, but Benjamin is not known to have been in France until 3 October 1916. He fought in the Battle of Transloy Ridge shortly afterwards. This was a period of terrible weather in which the heavy, clinging Somme mud and the freezing, flooded battlefield became as formidable an enemy as the Germans. The British gradually pressed forward, fighting against numerous counter attacks, in an effort to gain a front line on higher ground from which the offensive could be renewed the following spring.

The Rifle Brigade were again in action in April 1917 in the First Battle of Scarpe, the opening engagement of the Battle of Arras. Benjamin must have been wounded then, as he was evacuated from the battlefield and died of wounds on 16 April 1917. He was aged 37, and has a war grave at Warlincourt Halte British Cemetery, Saulty.

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This is the story of one of the men who appear on a war memorial at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church in Oxford, UK. These stories were compiled in 2018-19 from a variety of family history and military sources. In particular, Chris Baker's site, 'The Long, Long Trail' has provided valuable details of the men's experience of battle:

<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/>