

John Kewley

1892 - 1917

Born in the Bahamas

Methodist minister's son

Educated at Kingswood School, Bath, and Brasenose College Oxford

Died of wounds inflicted in Mesopotamia (now Iraq), aged 24, on 16 January 1917

Family and Education

John Tasker Kewley was born on 26 July 1892 in Harbour Island in the Bahamas. He was the son of a Wesleyan Methodist minister, Rev Joseph Kewley, who had been born in the Isle of Man. John was the older brother of George Raymond Kewley (who is also listed on the war memorial), and when George was born in 1895 the family were in Paulton in Somerset. Their mother was Elizabeth Abigail and there was another brother and two sisters. In 1901 the family were in Loughborough. Both John and George attended Kingswood School in Bath, a Methodist foundation. John won prizes in a range of subjects, and was selected for the school's first teams in rugby and in cricket, where he was praised for careful play and good defence.

In 1910 John was awarded a scholarship in Natural Science at Brasenose College Oxford and at the end of his first year he gained First Class in Maths. It was noted that his wide-ranging interests sometimes led him to 'fly off to something new before the old was quite finished'. He probably rowed for the college in 1912. At the 1911 census John was at the family home at Alsager, Cheshire, but by 1914 the family were in Warrington in Lancashire. That year he graduated Second Class in Chemistry with distinction in Mineralogy.

The outbreak of war disrupted John's plan for further study. Writing from an Officers' Training Corps camp at Churn near Didcot on 8 September 1914, he thanked the college for allowing him to withdraw and said he hoped 'to return ... and continue my career at Oxford in a very short time'. He added rather touchingly: 'Please excuse my writing in pencil, but I have lost my fountain pen and cannot write comfortably with another one'.

War Service: 6th (Service) Battalion, Loyal North Lancashire Regiment

On 22 August 1914 John joined the 6th battalion of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, which was formed at Preston that month. He became a Second Lieutenant in September. After training in England the unit sailed to Gallipoli in June 1915, landing at Anzac Cove in August. They served at Cape Helles, but were soon sent to Suvla Bay as part of an attempt to gain a second beachhead in Gallipoli.

The unit was one of three battalions that were almost wiped out in fierce fighting. They held out in appalling conditions, including severe heat, disease,

and artillery and sniper fire from Ottoman troops on higher ground. During this time John seems to have suffered an accident that kept him away from the worst fighting. Eventually they were evacuated to Egypt at the year end, when John was probably affected by the death on 11 December of James Clarke Stokoe, also recorded on the Wesley Mem memorial, who had joined the same unit in November: he had been at Corpus Christi from 1912.

In February 1916 the battalion was sent to Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) where an Anglo-Indian force was besieged by the Turks at Kut-al-Amara. The relief force made some progress up the River Tigris, but suffered heavy casualties, and then Kut fell at the end of April. Following this the battalion's chaplain was awarded a Victoria Cross, and John was made a temporary Captain. That summer he was invalided to Simla in India and convalesced alongside two other ex-Kingswood men.

After two months John returned to Mesopotamia and took part in a renewed offensive towards Kut launched in December 1916: his battalion was involved in fierce fighting to clear successive Turkish positions on the Tigris. John was wounded in this action and died on 16 January 1917 aged 24. This was only 8 months after his brother George. He is remembered at the Amara War Cemetery.

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/>

John Kewley's story incorporates details kindly provided by the Kingswood School Archivist from Kingswood Magazine, and by Brasenose College from its archives. Brasenose College also has a photo of John but was not able to give permission to reproduce it here.