

Lewis Brownjohn

1884 - 1916

Born in Oxford

School teacher in Manchester

Died at Guillemont, aged 31, on 30 July 1916

Family

Lewis Charles Brownjohn was born in Oxford in 1884. His father was John Brownjohn, born in Somerset, and his mother was Annie Kenny who was born in Oxford. His father was a compositor, arranging type for printing, almost certainly at Oxford University Press, and he also became a local preacher of the United Methodist Free Churches.

Lewis was the fifth of seven children, most of whom were baptised at Paradise Square Wesleyan Chapel. They lived mostly in the Jericho area of Oxford. Sadly in 1901 when Lewis was 16 and a pupil teacher, his youngest brother died aged three. Ten years later Lewis had moved to Manchester and worked as an assistant teacher, and a few years after that he was teaching at St Luke's National School in Manchester.

War Service: 17th (Service) Battalion, Manchester Regiment

Lewis volunteered in Manchester and joined the 17th Service Battalion of the Manchester Regiment as a Private. He arrived in France on 8 November 1915, and at some point he was promoted to Corporal. His unit did not see action until the Battle of the Somme and were engaged on its first day, 1 July 1916, until 11 July. The Battalion took heavy casualties but Lewis survived and it is likely that he was promoted to Sergeant at that time.

Then on 30 July Lewis's battalion took part in the Battle of Guillemont. Their attack was a costly failure because the German defence was particularly well organised. The night before as they moved forwards in the trenches they faced phosgene gas, and were probably the first British troops ever to experience this. They put on gas helmets and suffered some losses. Once out in the open they were impeded by thick barbed wire and many were caught at short range by rifle and machine-gun fire.

Lewis was killed that day, aged 31, but his body was not recovered. He is remembered on Thiepval Memorial. The reason for his being named on the Walton Street Methodist Church war memorial is unclear, but the connection may be through his brother Oliver, who had two children baptised there in 1915.

This is the story of one of the men who appear on the war memorial of Walton Street Methodist Church, which can now be seen at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church in Oxford, UK. These stories were compiled in 2019 based on detailed research by Stephanie Jenkins

(http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/war/walton_street_chapel/index.html), supplemented by information from a variety of military sources.