

Sidney* Griffin

1895 - 1918

Born in Oxford

Educated at Oxford Boys' High School and Jesus College Oxford

Died of wounds inflicted in Mesopotamia (now Iraq), aged 22, on 26 March 1918

Family and Education

Sidney James Griffin was born in Jericho, Oxford, on 12 August 1895. His father was Michael John Griffin (born in Blackthorn, Oxfordshire) and his mother was Kate Hannah Goldsmith (born in Kent). They married at St Paul's Church in Oxford and Sidney was the third of their seven surviving children. Michael was a printer, presumably working at Oxford University Press.

When he was aged 13 Sidney went to Oxford Boys' High School, and he became a pupil teacher. In 1914 he left to begin studying at Jesus College but soon volunteered to fight.

War Service: 3rd Battalion, Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry

Sidney was an Officers' Training Corps cadet and then joined the 3rd (Service) Battalion of the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry as a Second Lieutenant on 23 April 1915. They were at Portsmouth as a depot/training unit until the end of 1915. Then they were sent to Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), where conditions were appalling, with extreme heat, floods, flies, mosquitoes and disease. A large body of British and Indian troops was under siege by the Ottoman Turks at Kut-al-Amara: they included the Oxford and Buckinghamshire 1st Battalion.

Sidney arrived amongst the reinforcements on 7 January 1916, but it proved impossible to relieve the siege and his unit were not in action. In April over 13,000 besieged troops were forced into the largest British Army surrender for many years, and 300 of the 1st Oxford and Buckinghamshires were taken into captivity.

As a result of this embarrassing defeat, the British instituted a major reorganisation of the army. On 6 July 1916 Sidney and his comrades were merged with the soldiers of the 1st Battalion who had managed to escape, into a new 1st Battalion, working alongside Indian troops (eventually in the 15th Indian Division). They were kept out of action for the rest of 1916.

In a successful new offensive the British captured Baghdad in March 1917, and in September Sidney's unit was involved in the capture of Ramadi. At some point Sidney was promoted to Captain. Then on 9 March 1918 the battalion took part in the bloodless occupation of Hit.

Soon after this they fought at Khan Baghdadi, where a mobile force was sent to

* Sometimes spelt Sydney

dig in behind the Ottoman lines and block their retreat. This strategy was successful and a large force was captured, but Sidney was wounded and medical facilities were extremely limited. He died on 26 March at the age of 22. His probate record shows he left £175. He was buried at Baghdad, and is remembered on the memorials of Oxford Boys' High School, St Paul's Church and Jesus College.

In 1920 Sidney's parents and youngest siblings emigrated to Australia. His brother Herbert became Chairman for the Preservation of Rural England and was knighted in 1957.

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