

Reuben Nicholls

1890 - 1916

Born in Oxford

Gunner in 1911

Died at Pozieres, aged 26, on 29 July 1916

Family

Reuben Nicholls was born in Oxford between October and December 1890. He was the son of William Nicholls (born in Wiltshire) and his second wife Ann Elizabeth Edwards, who was born in George Street, Oxford. Neither was able to sign their name when they married.

The family lived in Jericho, Oxford, and Reuben was the second youngest child. When he was born his father, an umbrella maker, was already aged at least 61 and he died when Reuben was 18. Reuben's mother continued as an umbrella maker and chair caner, working at home. By 1911 Reuben was a gunner in the army, based at Cosham in Hampshire.

War Service: D Battery, 25th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery

When war broke out in 1914 Reuben served in D battery in the 25th Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery as part of the 1st Infantry Division. He was in the small professional army that was sent to France straight away, and had arrived by 16 August. Within days they were in action at the Battle of Mons, the first engagement with the German army, on the border between France and Belgium. The batteries used horse-drawn guns and Reuben would have been part of the team manoeuvring them into position and firing them. Their locations would soon have been identified by the Germans who retaliated with shells and machine-gun fire.

The British were compelled to retreat into France, and in early September they counter-attacked at the Battle of Marne and forced the Germans to fall back. Then Reuben's unit were redeployed to Belgium, and in October they fought at the First Battle of Ypres where the war became entrenched. Their next major action was in May 1915 at the Battle of Aubers. That summer Reuben's mother died in Oxford and was buried on 4 August.

September 1915 brought action for Reuben at Loos, but no further major battles until the Battle of the Somme in July 1916, where he survived the early engagements. Then his lengthy run of luck ran out and he was killed in action on 29 July, aged 26, apparently during a lull in the Battle of Pozieres. He is buried in Mametz, and his family paid for the inscription 'Until we meet again' to be added to his headstone. He is also remembered on the war memorial of St Paul's Church, Oxford.

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.