

George Turtle

1877 - 1917

Born in Oxford

Enlisted in 1900; later became an upholsterer

Married with four surviving children

Died at Salonika, Greece, aged 39, on 24 April 1917

Family

George Arthur Turtle was born in Oxford between October and December 1877. He was the youngest of the nine children of Edward Turtle and Sarah Ann Ryman, both born in Oxfordshire. They had married at Woodstock and lived there initially, but by 1872 they had moved to Oxford. Most of the children were baptised at the old New Inn Hall Street Wesleyan Chapel, before Wesley Memorial Church was opened in 1878. Edward had been a shoemaker, but by 1881 he had become an insurance agent.

George's mother died when he was only four years old. In 1891 he was living with his father and some of his older siblings: it looks as if one of his adult sisters kept house. In 1893 when George was 16 he suffered the loss of the brother nearest to him in age, who died at 18: the funeral was taken by a Wesleyan minister, Rev T Frederick Nicholson, in the St Paul's section of St Sepulchre's Cemetery.

On 6 September 1900 George joined the 4th Battalion of the Oxfordshire Light Infantry, during the Boer War. His enlistment papers show that he was an upholsterer, and had previously been rejected for army service, being 'under chest and weight' requirements. He seems to have given his age as 19, although he would have been 22. Surprisingly his height is recorded as 6ft 7¾ins, with a chest measurement of only 32ins: probably the 6 should have been a 5. His religion is down as Church of England, although "Wesleyan" was an option on the form completed on his behalf.

In 1901 George was living in barracks in Hampshire, and he was due to serve until 1906, but at the end of 1902 he purchased his discharge for £3. It may be significant that the Boer War had ended in May that year, although George's unit did not serve overseas.

In August 1903 George married Nellie Annie Mazey at Cowley, giving his address as Birkenhead, and that was where their first child was born in 1903/4. But by the end of 1905 the family were in St Ebbe's in Oxford. In 1908 the surviving brother next nearest in age to George died, aged 36.

By 1911 George and Nellie had three children, lived in Jericho in Oxford, and attended Walton Street Methodist Church. George was working as an upholsterer. His father had died aged 75 the previous year. To add to his losses his fourth child, Elsie, died in 1914 aged only two. A further son was born later that year.

War Service: 7th (Service) Battalion, Duke of Edinburgh (Wiltshire) Regiment

George was aged 36 when war was declared in 1914. His previous unit had

become the territorial 4th Battalion of the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, and George may still have been associated with it. He joined the 7th (Service) Battalion of the Duke of Edinburgh (Wiltshire) Regiment which formed in Devizes, and served as a Private. They were deployed to Salonika in Greece (now the port of Thessaloniki) as part of the 26th Division. George arrived with the division in France on 21 September 1915. They travelled on via Marseilles, arriving in Greece in November.

At Salonika the Allies assembled a diverse international force. This faced shelling from the Bulgarians and their allies who entrenched themselves on high ground around the city. Conditions were severe with freezing winters and baking summers, and there were many deaths from malaria, dysentery and influenza. George's unit were in action in the Battle of Horseshoe Hill in August 1916. He was then involved in the first Battle of Doiran on 24 April 1917. His unit had to cross a ravine at night under fire, and as they came up the other side they were picked out by searchlights: few of them reached the Bulgarian trenches. He was killed and his body was not recovered. He was aged 39 (though curiously his Commonwealth War Grave certificate says he was 44). He is remembered on the Doiran Memorial and also listed on the St Paul's Church war memorial in Oxford. His effects came to £6 13s 8d and were passed on to his widow with a war gratuity of £12. In 1920 she married Charles H Kitchen, and they had a son.

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.

Details of the Wiltshire's experience at the battle of Doiran can be found at: <https://salonikacampaignsociety.org.uk/salonika-centenary/doiran-1917-april-24/>