

Walter George Hollingdale

My granddad Walter George Hollingdale lived in Midhurst and enlisted from West Lavington with 13th Royal Sussex regiment in November 1915. He trained at Witley, near Milford, and was posted to Belgium in March 1916.

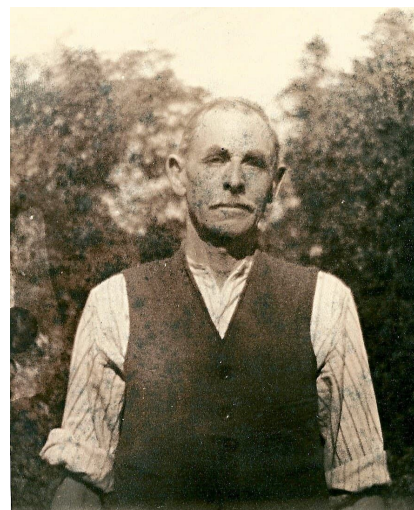
In a failed diversionary tactic, Sussex regiments were decimated at the Battle of Boars Head. Walter was injured with shrapnel on 30th June 1916, the day before the Somme. My aunt, aged 90, remembers that Walter (her dad) lay injured for two days in a muddy trench, his pals dying around him, and was reported missing until found on I imagine 2nd July and sent back home 5th July le Havre to Newhaven Fort. Horrendous. He came back an injured man and suffering from shell-shock, which was with him many years. Until he died he had a hole in his lower back, just skin, as a result of the shrapnel. In 1917 he was transferred to the Royal Defence Corps and was put to digging graves in Newhaven.

He was demobbed at Hounslow in 1919 and became gravedigger at Midhurst cemetery 1924-60. He loved the quiet of the graveyard. He never spoke about any of this to his family but in loud storms he would hide under the table because it reminded him of the trenches. If only I'd known then what he went through.

He was born 1889 and died 1963.

Pictures taken in 1917 after recovery - married my grandmother Ellen Gumbrell of Tillington; and as gravedigger in 1959.

- as told by Colin Tufnell in November 2018



Note: The Battle of Boar's Head was known as the day Sussex died. The 13th Battalion (Walter's) lost 800 men – killed, wounded or captured. The sound of artillery could be heard on the Sussex coast.