

Tom POOK

Born, Tedburn St Mary, 1880
Private, No 26714

Died 26 October 1917, aged 37
Devonshire Regiment, 8th (Reserve) Battalion

Tom Pook was the son of George and Mary Ann Pook and was born in Tedburn St Mary in the last quarter of 1880 (GRO ref St Thomas, 1880, Oct-Dec, vol 5b, page 65). George Pook (1844-1923) and Mary Ann (nee Soper 1846-1931) were from families rooted in Tedburn.

They were living at that time in Towns End Cottage and George was a gamekeeper. Both parents and the first five children had been born in Tedburn St Mary, and appear in the 1881 census as:

George Pook (1844-)	Head	Gamekeeper
Mary Ann " (1844-)	wife	Gamekeeper's wife
Elizabeth " (1868-)	dau	Scholar
Harry " (1870-)	son	"
Harriett Hela " (1872-)	dau	"
Mary " (1874-)	dau	"
Lilly " (1876-)	dau	"
Sidney " (1878-)	son	born Whitestone
Tom " (1880-1917)	son	born Tedburn St Mary

In 1891 they had moved within Tedburn to Downs Cottage and there were three more children:

Frederick " (1883-)	son	{
Mabel " (1886-)	dau	{ born Tedburn St Mary
William " (1888-)	son	{

In 1901 they had moved again to 'Little Heaven' and the oldest child still at home was Lilly, then 23. The 1911 census reveals that 10 children were born and still living, as were the parents.

Tom appears again in the 1911 census, aged 30, living as a single man and gardener/caretaker at Eastdon House, Starcross. At that time Eastdon House was the home of John George Denman Partridge who bought it from the family of Charles Eales. While he was there Tom helped plant fruit trees and his employer, John G Partridge, took him to Exeter in 1912 to choose trees to plant. It was recorded that they still produced fruit in 1984 when the family sold the house. (see separate doc – Letter from hospital)

In all of the references **Tom** is shown as 'Tom' and not Thomas.

Tom married Emily Philpot at Dawlish Parish Church on 5th October, 1912.

They both gave their address as 10, The Strand, Dawlish.

Emily was the daughter of Henry Philpot, a labourer shown as deceased, although her mother had died but her father lived until 1916. The Philpot family came from Kent. Henry Philpot (1845-1916) (GRO death ref Maidstone Dec 1916, vol 2a, p 1148) was born in Hunton, between Tonbridge and Maidstone and his wife, Mary Ann Chilton (1845-1882) was born nearby in Peckham, Kent. They went to live in Barming, also close by, where Henry was an agricultural labourer and they had most of their nine children, although four had died by 1911 when Henry was living with a widower and her son in Maidstone.

Emily is recorded as a servant in various households in Hastings (1901), and Cheltenham (1911), when she was a nurse in the Geidt household. Bernard George Geidt was a member of the

Indian Civil Service working in Bengal when he married Agnes Ellen Woolaston in Christchurch, Hampshire in October 1890. They returned to India where they had three sons, the youngest of which was Charles Uppleby Geidt (q.v.) who is remembered on St Mary's, Cofton war memorial. Agnes Ellen Geidt died in India in 1894 and Bernard Geidt married for the third time, to Violet Louisa Waterfield in St Mary's Cofton in October 1902.

Violet Waterfield's parents, William and Louisa Waterfield, were tenants and living at Eastdon House, Cockwood, in 1902 (Kelly's Directory). William Waterfield died in 1907 and his widow continued to live there with Captain Waterfield until 1910.

Bernard and Violet Geidt had a son in 1904 (at Eastdon?) who died in infancy and they then moved to Bengal where they had another son in 1907. When Bernard Geidt retired in May 1908 from the Indian Civil Service, where he had been a High Court Judge, it seems likely the Geidt family retired to Cheltenham and acquired a nurse, Emily Philpot, for their son who was one year old.

It is not clear if Emily Philpot had been employed while they were living in the Newton Abbot district 1902-1904.

Tom Pook enlisted at Newton Abbot and was given the Service Number 26714 in the 8th (Service) Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment. The 8th Devons was the first service battalion formed by the Regiment in the First World War. Raised in August 1914 from a nucleus of officers and NCOs from the 1st Battalion, they quickly spawned a second battalion – the 9th – who became their twin and with whom they would serve very closely until 1918. In early August 1915 the 8th, and then the 9th, joined 20 Brigade in the 7th Division in France.

After the briefest experience in the line, both Battalions were hurled into the **Battle of Loos** on 25th September. In this single battle the 8th suffered 639 casualties and the 9th 476, including eight men from Dawlish who were lost on this day. The survivors of the two Battalions held the position until the evening of 26th September, when they were withdrawn.

After a spell near Givenchy both Battalions moved to the Somme area. The Somme remained a relatively quiet sector until the offensive began on 1st July 1916. On the 4th July the Padre of the 8th Devons, Capt Crosse, buried 160 officers and men of both Battalions at Mansel Copse, erecting a plaque: "**The Devonshires held this trench. The Devonshires hold it still.**"

In April 1917 during the Battle of Arras both Battalions attacked Ecoust with great success and light casualties but, a month later, capturing part of Bullecourt cost them 382 killed and wounded. It seems likely that Tom Pook was injured at this time for he wrote a letter from Endell Street Military Hospital, London, on 24th May referring to a bad ankle injury. This was a celebrated military hospital set up and run by women doctors and nurses. In due course he rejoined his regiment in France.

Early October found both Battalions near Passchendaele enduring the worst of the Third Battle of Ypres. On the 26th in an unsuccessful attack on Gheluvelt both lost heavily – especially among their officers, only three of whom from the two Battalions emerged unscathed.

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The battalions had moved forward on the evening of the 25th October and dug in to prepared positions for the assault. There was little shell fire overnight but the boggy ground necessitated some changes of position.

At 5.40am an attack was launched with the intention of capturing the Gheluvelt and Zandvoorde spur and securing a hold on the Tower Hamlets ridge (in the vicinity of Zonnebeke and Becelaere, Flanders) . Aerial reconnaissance had shown German positions in strongly defended pill boxes and consolidated shell holes. The War Diary records land features, "the ground slopes upwards nearly to the first objective then, dipped and rose again up to the church in Gheluvelt, which was in a comparatively commanding position. From there it fell away rapidly to the final objective and from there, dropped down into low ground." "The only prominent landmarks were the MENIN road, which was clearly marked by stumps of trees, the Polderhoek chateau and the church and mill in Gheluvelt."

It is clear from the detailed report that the advance of the 9th Battalion was met with heavy rifle and machine-gun fire from strongly defended positions and pill boxes. The 8th Battalion was intended to move up from the rear and take over the advance and in doing so also lost many men. In the course of the attack "all Lewis guns and Vickers machine guns were out of action from shell-fire and mud, and rifles had become unworkable owing to the mud." Further, the enemy counter-attack at 10am was mounted by "lightly-equipped troops and many of them were armed with revolvers. This gave them the advantage over our men, many of them stuck in mud, and most of whose rifles had become unserviceable."

The report by the Lieutenant Colonel in command ends with the statistic that 2 Officers were killed and 4 were missing, 20 other ranks were killed and 105 were missing ("there must be a certain number of prisoners but there must also be a large number killed and lying in German territory").

Cofton War memorial inscription: Thomas Pook, 8th Devon Regt October 26th 1917

Commonwealth War Graves entry:

Rank: Private Service No:26714 Devonshire Regiment 8th Bn.

Date of Death: 26/10/1917 Age:37

Cemetery: [HOOGE CRATER CEMETERY](#) Grave Reference: VIII. A. 8.

Additional Information: Son of George and Mary Ann Pook, of Tedburn St. Mary, Devon; husband of Emily Pook, of Flat 3, 167, Victoria St., Westminster, London.

Last known address: 10 The Strand, Dawlish.

Next of kin: Emily Pook, wife. It is not known if there were children of the marriage.

References:

Free Birth, marriage, death refs

Marriage certificate (GRO)

<http://www.keepmilitarymuseum.org/history/first+world+war/the+devonshire+regiment/the+eighth+and+ninth+battalions>

Kelly's Directory, Devon 1902

Refs via subscription website (ancestry)

Census data

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Army enlistment forms for William Pook

Devonshire Regiment war diaries

Family trees: Ancestry.com

Davies

Scott

Buttery

Charles Herbert Philpot

Kingman Ford & Wilson

Partridge family records