

Hubert John BRIGHT

Born Holcombe 1st January 1897
Corporal 25800

Died France 17 April 1917, aged 20
Machine Gun Corps

At first sight **Hubert John Bright** has no clear connection to Dawlish for his parents moved from home to home wherever there was work. His grandfather, John Bright (1845-1906), was a farmer who was born in Colyton and married Jane Dunster from Dunkerswell. They had a large family and Frederick Bright(1875-1932) was their fourth son to be born in Colyton.

Frederick Bright married Charlotte Jarman(1874-1946) of Holcombe in the Oct-Dec Quarter of 1896 (Honiton, Vol 5b, p29). **Hubert** was one of twin boys, the other being Reginald Charles Bright, q.v., born in Holcombe on 1st January 1897. Their births were registered by Agnes Jarman who could have been the older sister of Charlotte or their mother, also Agnes wife of Charles Jarman.

The Jarman family profile is recorded in the note on Thomas Frederick Jarman who died on 22 June 1915, q.v.

The census of 1901 shows that Frederick and Charlotte were living at Kerswell Cottage, Kenn with four children, the twins Hubert John and Reginald Charles, 4, Frederick Leonard, 2 born in Honiton and Florence Agnes Rose, 1 month and born in Exminster. Frederick was 26 and an agricultural labourer.

Frederick and Charlotte are presumed to have roamed across East Devon as the recorded places of birth of their further children show. By 1911 they were living at "Burrows", Clayhidon, Wellington, Somerset with Leonard, 13 born in Awliscombe, (Florence) Agnes, 10 born in Exminster, Mary (Jane), 7 born in Dalwood, Winifred, 5 also born in Dalwood, and Thomas, 3 born in Honiton. They had a niece, Vera Jarman, 2, staying with them. The census data from 1911 shows that they had seven children in all, and all still living. A further child, Harry George, was born in 1912.

Hubert, 14, was absent in 1911 as he is listed in Queen Street, Honiton, living with his employer, Thomasine Richards, a widow aged 63. He was engaged in general porting work. Other data suggests that Frederick and Charlotte moved again to Egypt Cottage, Hemyock when the War Office corresponded at Hubert's death. Frederick died in the Wellington, Somerset, district in 1932 (Oct- Dec, Vol 5c, page 327) aged 58.

Hubert John Bright is on record as enlisting at Walworth, South London, and his initial posting was to the Rifle Brigade, service number Z/502. At some point he transferred to the Machine Gun Corps, Infantry battalion, service number 25800.

He entered France on the 11th January 1915.

In 1914, all infantry battalions were equipped with a machine gun section of two guns, which was increased to four in February 1915. The sections were equipped with Maxim guns, served by a subaltern and 12 men. The obsolescent Maxim had a maximum rate of fire of 500 rounds, so was the equivalent of around 40 well-trained riflemen. However, production of the weapons could not keep up with the rapidly expanding army and the BEF was still 237 guns short of the full establishment in July 1915. The British Vickers company could, at most, produce 200 new weapons per week, and struggled to do that. Contracts were placed with firms in the USA, which were to produce the Vickers designs under licence.

On 2 September 1915 a definite proposal was made to the War Office for the formation of a single specialist Machine Gun Company per infantry brigade, by withdrawing the guns and gun

teams from the battalions. They would be replaced at battalion level by the light Lewis machine guns and thus the firepower of each brigade would be substantially increased. The Machine Gun Corps was created by Royal Warrant on October 14 followed by an Army Order on 22 October 1915. The companies formed in each brigade would transfer to the new Corps. The MGC would eventually consist of infantry Machine Gun Companies, cavalry Machine Gun Squadrons and Motor Machine Gun Batteries. The pace of reorganisation depended largely on the rate of supply of the Lewis guns but it was completed before the Battle of the Somme in 1916. A Base Depot for the Corps was established at Camiers.

Shortly after the formation of the MGC, the Maxim guns were replaced by the Vickers, which became a standard gun for the next five decades. The Vickers machine gun is fired from a tripod and is cooled by water held in a jacket around the barrel. The gun weighed 28.5 pounds, the water another 10 and the tripod weighed 20 pounds. Bullets were assembled into a canvas belt, which held 250 rounds and would last 30 seconds at the maximum rate of fire of 500 rounds per minute. Two men were required to carry the equipment and two the ammunition. A Vickers machine gun team also had two spare men.

The 17th Machine Gun Company was part of the 17th Brigade and formed part of the 24th Division. It fought in the Battle of Arras, from 9th April to 16th May. "From this, even without records, we can reliably deduce his original unit as being the 3rd.Rifle Brigade.... in October 1915, transferred with 3rd.Rifle Brigade to 24th.Division. In 1916 the 17 Brigade suffered in the German attack at Wulverghem and then joined the Somme offensive, seeing action in the battles of Delville Wood and Guillemont. We do not know whether Hubert served with the 3rd.Rifle Brigade or 17th.M.G.C. during these battles but both were part of 17 Brigade and he would have been at all of them with either unit. In April the following year, the Brigade was involved in seizing Vimy Ridge as part of the Battle of Arras. It was here that Hubert was killed." The British effort was a relatively broad frontal assault between Vimy in the north-west and Bullecourt in the south-east.

When the battle officially ended on 16 May, British Empire troops had made significant advances but had been unable to achieve a breakthrough. New tactics and the equipment to exploit them had been used, showing that the British had absorbed the lessons of the Battle of the Somme and could mount set-piece attacks against fortified field defences. The Arras sector then returned to the stalemate that typified most of the war on the Western Front.

Neither of the twins are listed in the Devon Roll of Honour for Dawlish, nor on the Dawlish Boys' School Roll of Honour or the Dawlish War memorial. Reginald Charles Bright is remembered at St George's, Holcombe where a small memorial tablet is mounted near the entrance.

The Arras Memorial is in the Faubourg-d'Amiens Cemetery, which is in the Boulevard du General de Gaulle in the western part of the town of Arras. The cemetery is near the Citadel, approximately 2 kms due west of the railway station.

Last known address: Queen Street, Honiton

Next of kin: Father, Frederick Bright

References:

Free Birth Marriage Death records

Holcombe Village records

Dawlish World War One Project

The Long, Long trail website history of Machine Gun Corps

Battle of Arras <http://ww1centenary.oucs.ox.ac.uk/battle-of-arras/the-battle-of-arras-an-overview/>

Machine gun corps archive group maguncor@bt.internet.com

Via subscription website, Ancestry:

UK, Army Register of Soldiers' Effects

Census data

Medal Rolls Index Cards

Roberts Family Tree – via Ancestry