

## Remembering the Great War

### Fred Severn Foster

Fred was born at 152 Main Street, Woodborough on 29th September 1898. He was the eldest child of James and Eliza Foster. Eliza was the daughter of Thomas Severn and Fred bears his mother's maiden name. At the time of the 1901 census, James, Eliza and Fred were staying with Eliza's family in Hucknall Torkard and James' occupation is a gardener.

By the time of the 1911 census, James was now a Market Gardener living at Clarence Villa, Woodborough. Fred is now 12 and at school and he has a younger brother, John Thomas, born 10th Feb 1910. He would later be joined by a sister, Cassandra, in 1915, and another brother, Wilfred James, born 27th April 1917. All the brothers worked in the family business

Because of his young age and the fact that it was the final year of the war, Fred would have been conscripted into the army. He enlisted at Nottingham and was posted to the 3rd Battalion Durham Light Infantry at South Shields on 1st June 1918. He was 19y 8m old. He embarked for France arriving on 11th October and was sent to join the 13th Battalion Durham Light Infantry at Etaples. The battalion had previously won honours on the Somme 1916, Messines and Ypres 1917.

Shortly after arriving in France, Fred wrote to his parents on 14th October and told them of his journey over the Channel and his present well-being. This was Fred's first sea journey and his letter shows a mood of expectation and adventure. There is no sign of the fear of war in his words.

Dear Father and Mother,

Just a few lines hoping you are quite well as I am in the pink. Well I had a very nice ride over the water, I enjoyed it very much. To say it was the first time, I never felt any signs of sea-sickness as I thought I should. Well I am quite alright plenty to eat and drink, that is something, and plenty of fags at about half price as you get them.

The money here takes a lot of reckoning up. It is mostly in francs and there are only few words they say which you can understand.

Well how is Cass getting on, does she suck her thumb yet. I expect she has come back from Grandad's by now. I expect Tommy is as rough as ever and Wilfred he will be able to walk about well by now. I would like to see him running up and down the yard. Well I will now close hoping it will find you in the best of health as it pleases me at present. With best love,

Your loving son  
Fred  
xxxxxxxxxxx

If you write to Grandad, remember me to them.

Uncle Ernest, Aunt Bettie and Tom, Wilf and Cass.

Somewhere in France

We are not settled down yet so I cannot give you any address but I will do so as soon as possible.

I enclose a card hoping you receive it alright.

The letter was written by Fred whilst the battalion was in Premont and was the only letter Fred sent to his parents whilst on the Western Front. Exactly two weeks later Fred was killed by a sniper's bullet and two weeks after his death, the war ended. He was killed during the very final stages of the Allied assault on the retreating Germans.

The Allies had just re-captured the town of Le Cateau and were rapidly pursuing the enemy. They had reached the outskirts of Landrecies, normally a pretty area surrounded by orchards. However, at this stage the Germans were putting up a strong fight and their machine gunners commanded the roads, paths and gaps in hedges. They also had excellent vantage points from houses from where they could observe the movement of Allied troops. The Durham's battalion diary states that despite this, patrols were sent out day and night. On 28th October, the battalion received orders to establish posts on a designated track. However, patrols reported that the track was held by the enemy. Fred was on one of these patrols when his life was tragically cut short.

As was the case with many soldiers, he had made an agreement with a friend, a Private Moore who came from Pinxton, Derbyshire, and they had agreed between them that if anything happened to either of them, the remaining man would contact his parents. True to his word, Private Moore wrote to Fred's parents. He explained to them that Fred had been on patrol when he was shot by a sniper in the back. He died almost instantly. Private Moore's letter dated 30th October said:

Dear Mr & Mrs. Foster

I have got the sad work of writing a few lines to you to let you know that your son Fred has been killed whilst fighting for the old flag. It was his wish if anything happened to him to write and let you know and the reverse if anything happened to me, but I have got the sad work. He was killed by a sniper whilst out on patrol, the bullet went straight through his back. He never uttered a word after being hit. I have lost a very good chum and it knocked all the life out of me that day. My home is at Pinxton and if I have the luck to get through this lot I might get the chance of seeing you personally. My name is Pte. B. Moore 100937, Y Coy 13th Bn DLI , 25 Div, BEF. If there is anything in his pockets I expect the burial party will forward them on. Well I think this is about all this time.

I remain Yours faithfully  
Pte. B Moore

Fred is buried at the small Landrecies British Cemetery which is situated in the north-west part of the town. The cemetery contains only 151 casualties. He rests in grave A.26. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission index simply lists the minimum of facts:

Foster, Pte. F.S., 100946. 13th Bn Durham Light Inf. 28th Oct., 1918.

\*\*\*\*\*

Below: Part of Fred's last letter to his parents dated 14th October 1918

**Soldiers' Christian Association.**  
 ON ACTIVE SERVICE. S.C.A. CAMP HOME.  
 14.10.18 101  
 REPLY TO \_\_\_\_\_  
 State \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Regt. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Rank \_\_\_\_\_  
 etc. \_\_\_\_\_

**Patron:**  
 HERMANNUS B.A.,  
 The DUKE OF CONNAUGHT,  
 G.C., G.C., K.P., M.C.

**Chairman:**  
 Gen. D. F. DOUGLAS-JONES.

**Secretary:**  
 G. J. BYRNELL.

**Headquarters:**  
 "Dundas House,"  
 295, Vauxhall Bridge Road,  
 Victoria, London, S.W.

Dear Father & Mother

I've got a few lines  
 hoping you are quite well as I am in the  
 pink. Well I had a very nice ride  
 over the water, I enjoyed it very much  
 to say it was the first time I  
 felt any signs of sea sickness, as I

Below: Part of the letter from Pte B Moore to Fred's parents on 30th October 1918

For God, For King & For Country.

**Y.M.C.A.** **Y.M.C.A.** **Y.M.C.A.**  
 WITH  
**H.M. FORCES ON ACTIVE SERVICE**

BY THE  
 Y.M.C.A. NATIONAL COUNCIL  
 11, M. THE KING

PATRON  
 MILITARY CAMP DEPT.  
 11, M. THE KING

Reply to \_\_\_\_\_ Company \_\_\_\_\_ Ser. *Grice* Oct 30 1918

Stationed at  
*To Mr & Mrs Foster.*

I have got the sad work  
 of writing a few lines to you, to let you  
 know that your son Fred has been  
 killed whilst fighting for the old flag.  
 It was his wish if anything happened  
 to him to write and let you know, and the  
 reverse if anything happened to me, but I have