



COLLINGHAM IN THE GREAT WAR

Name, Rank & Regiment of Soldier:

Belton Oldham
Private
9th Sherwood Foresters

Service no: 80830



Date of birth	Date died of wounds	Age
1881	Nov 5 th 1918	37

Background: Belton Oldham

Belton Oldham was born in Collingham and baptised at St John the Baptist on 22nd November 1881. His father was James Belton Oldham (1859 – 1924), an agricultural labourer, born Cawkwell's Yard, Newark but reared by his grandparents, Henry and Mary Ann Oldham, on Cottage Lane, Collingham¹. Belton's mother was **Mary Jane Burley** (1854 – 1932). She married James in Newark in 1879 and lived in Collingham. However, by 1891 (census) their address was given as Eagle Hall.

Children on the 1891 census include:

Isabella Oldham born Collingham (b 1880)²

Belton Oldham born Collingham 1881

Joseph Oldham born Eagle Hall 1885 (died 1924)

Emma Oldham born Eagle Hall 1889 (died 1960)

The baptism dates imply the Oldhams were in Collingham from around 1880 - 1885, moved to Eagle and then returned to Collingham around 1891, when daughter Francis Fanny (1891-1920) was born followed by Sophia (1894 – 1941). James and Mary lived in Collingham for the rest of their lives and are buried in North Collingham churchyard. Mary was living in a cottage in Crown Yard behind Crown House, High St in 1924.

By 1911 Belton is 28, single and a general labourer living at the home of his uncle, William Ross, 37 Orchard Terr, Bolsover. His occupation is recorded as Colliery Fireman in February 1917

¹ Source: TG Spencer family tree, Ancestry 1861 census.

² Isabella worked as a domestic servant for the Sheldons on Low St by 1901 & married Fred Vickers in North Collingham (All Saints Church) in 1907.

Military History: Private Belton Oldham

Belton Oldham's job as a miner would have been regarded as a reserved occupation. However, by 1916 even those working in jobs of national importance were being targeted by the government to enlist. Oldham's entry on the Nottinghamshire County Council Roll of Honour website originally suggested Belton could have been a 'Derby Scheme' man (see page 4). However, this information has since been simplified.

His record shows the following:

Attested: 1st march 1916

In reserve: 2nd March 1916

Medical: 20th February Class B

Mobilized (called up) 8th March 1917

*'He was then sent to France and posted to the 9th Battalion. During the fighting at Sebourg on 4 November 1918 he was wounded in the chest and left arm. He was taken to a Casualty Clearing Station at Cambrai but died of his wounds on 5 November 1918. He is buried in the **Cambrai East Military Cemetery**, which was a German cemetery taken over by the British. Unusually it has German, French and British graves. He is buried in plot II. A. 15. The German commandant handed over the well-kept cemetery in August 1918.*

Belton Oldham was aged 34 on enlistment - 1/3/16 and 35 years on mobilization 8/3/17.³

Sebourg November 4th 1918

The village of Sebourg nr Valenciennes was the scene of a fierce battle in an attempt to cross the River Aunelle on November 4th 1918.

This was the last battle the 9th Battalion Sherwood Foresters were engaged in during the war and although victorious, the victory came at a cost with over 50 men killed and many wounded. The excellent Radcliffe-on-Trent in World War 1 website has extracts from the 9th Battalion Sherwood Foresters commanding officer's war diary at the time. Radcliffe-on-Trent's John Norwell was one of the 50 men killed alongside Pte Oldham:

<http://www.radcliffeontrentww1.org.uk/portfolio-items/john-nowell-2/>

Belton Oldham died the following day of wounds sustained on Nov 4th. This makes Belton Oldham the last to man on the Collingham War memorials to die in combat before the Armistice on November 11th. A fellow Sherwood Forester, **Harry Wright**, had died on **Nov 4th** but this was of influenza/pneumonia. Another Collingham casualty, **Joseph Taylor**, died of

³ <http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/rollofhonour/People/Details/2301>

wounds on 14th November and a further two men, **Albert P Walker** and **Arthur Brompton**, died in 1919.

In Remembrance

Private Belton Oldham is buried in Cambrai East Cemetery, Nord France

Plot: II.A 15

He is also remembered on the All Saints War Memorial Cross, Parishioners' Plaque and Roll of Honour.

Fellow 9th Battalion Sherwood Forester Private James Liley, killed in action on the Somme 1916 can be found on the South Collingham memorials.



Belton Oldham's grave in Cambrai East Military Cemetery seen here in the middle. Photo: John Morse with kind permissions from Nottinghamshire County Council Roll of Honour

The Derby Scheme or Group System

The following information is taken from the Long, Long Trail website:

By spring 1915 the flow of volunteer recruits was dwindling. The government, torn when it came to the question of compulsory military service, tried a half-way house scheme and passed the **National Registration Act on 15 July 1915** as a step towards stimulating recruitment and to discover how many men between the ages of 15 and 65 were engaged in each trade.

All those in this age range who were not already in the military were obliged to register, giving details of their employment details. The results of this census became available by mid-September 1915: it showed there were almost 5 million males of military age who were not in the forces, of which 1.6m were in the “starred” (protected, high or scarce skill) jobs.



Lord Derby (1865-1948)

Having been appointed Director-General of Recruiting in October 1915, Lord Derby immediately put the information gathered to use.

He brought forward a programme often called the **Derby Scheme** although its official title was the Group Scheme, for raising the numbers. Men aged 18 to 40 were informed that under the scheme they could continue to enlist voluntarily or attest with an obligation to come if called up later on. The War Office notified the public that voluntary enlistment would soon cease and that the last day of registration would be **15 December 1915**.

Attestation

Men who attested under the Derby Scheme, who were accepted for service and chose to defer it were classified as being in “Class A”. Those who agreed to immediate service were “Class B”. The Class A men were paid a day’s army pay for the day they attested; were given a grey armband with a red crown as a sign that they had so volunteered; were officially transferred into Section B Army Reserve; and were sent back to their homes and jobs until they were called up.

215,000⁴ men enlisted while the scheme was on and another 2,185,000 attested for deferred enlistment

The men who attested in Class ‘A’ under the Derby Scheme were classified into married and single status and into 23 groups according to their age/year of birth.

Group 1 were called up 28th March 1916

⁴ Other sources put the figure at 318,553 medically fit single men (Wikipedia)

Groups 2 - 5 were called up in the last two weeks of January 1916

Groups 6 - 13 in February etc until by June all 46 groups would have been attested (signed up).

Oldham, born in 1881 would have been on Group 40.

The scheme failed when 38% of single men and 54% of marrieds who were not in "starred" jobs (unlike Belton Oldham) still avoided this form of recruitment. This still left the government short and conscription was introduced by the 2nd March 1916 for single men between 18-41 and on May 25th married men in the same age group.

The dates Belton Oldham attested are too close to call as to whether he was a 'Derby Man' or conscripted. At any rate it was another year before he was mobilized.

Sources

Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/>)

East Trent Genealogy (<http://www.easttrentgenealogy.co.uk/>)

Commonwealth War Graves Commission (<https://www.cwgc.org/>)

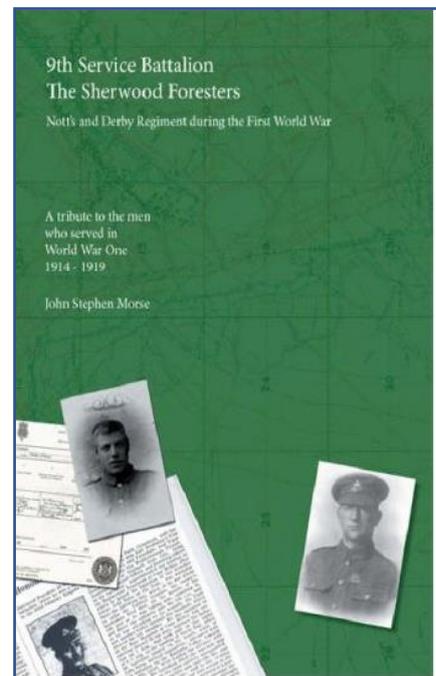
Nottinghamshire County Council Roll of Honour
(<http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/rollofhonour>)

The Long, Long Trail
(<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/>)

Radcliffe on Trent in WW1.org.uk

Books:

John Stephen Morse '9th Service Battalion The Sherwood Foresters' published 2007.



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