

Name of soldier:

Sheldon, Harry

Rank: Sergeant

Regiment: 1st/6th Sherwood Foresters

No: 204788

*Right: Sgt Sheldon in Sherwood Rangers
Yeomanry uniform c/o Colin Storm*



| Date of birth | Date KIA | Age |
|--|----------------------------|-----|
| Nov 12 th 1892 ¹ | 26 th Sept 1918 | 25 |

Background: **Harry Sheldon**

Harry was the son of George Sheldon (1859 – 1931), farmer & cattle dealer and Mary née Waddington (1858 -1916). The Sheldons farmed on 139 Low Street [‘The Farm’].

Harry was baptised at All Saints Church on 28th December 1892. He had an older brother, Charles (1890 – 1980), and a younger sister, Edith (1893 - 1972)². Harry attended the Infants’ School which is now the Youth and Community Centre on Low Street and is thought to have been sent away to a boarding school in Blackpool after that.

By the time the war broke out, Harry and Charles were sharing the management of the family business. When Harry enlisted, Charles was left in charge. Charles was brought before the Newark Rural Tribunals at least twice in 1916 in a bid to make him enlist too.³ This reflects the no-win situation in which many farmers found themselves. On the one hand they were expected to increase production at a time of food shortages (especially beef) and manpower and on the other they were sanctioned for not joining the army. To make a bad year worse, Mary, their mother, died in September 1916, aged 58.

Branches of the Sheldon family still live in the village today. Charles’ granddaughter, Mrs Beth Foster, still lives at ‘The Farm’ and runs a B&B business. Her brother, Mr Tim Sheldon, hosts the annual Collingham Show on his land off Newark Road at ‘Larksfield’ and farms land in Brough and Collingham.

¹ See Infants School Log Book in Notts Archives

² Edith Sheldon married South Muskham farmer William Storm in 1922 and lived & farmed in Sutton-on-Trent.

³ See T Frecknall’s ‘Collingham and District in The Great War’ p 56

Military History: Sgt. Harry Sheldon

Enlisted: Retford 2nd November 1914

Physical Appearance: Height = 5' 7 ¼ " Eyes/Hair = brown Complexion = fair

Age on enlistment: 21 yrs 11 mths

The following information (and photograph on p1) is from the 'Our Nottinghamshire' website, researched by Graham Snowdon, a descendant of the family in 2014:

'Harry Sheldon (204788 H. Sheldon Sgt), who worked on his family's farm at Collingham, signed up with the 1/6th Sherwood Foresters (Notts and Derby Regiment) at Retford just short of his 22nd birthday, on 2nd November 1914.

He was promoted from Private to Corporal within six months, and was given his Sergeant's stripes 19th June 1917. Against the odds, he survived for four years, all but six weeks⁴, before being killed in action on the Somme on 26th September 1918.

He is buried along with 757 other identified casualties from both sides of the war in the Roisel Communal Cemetery Extension. Roisel is a small town around a dozen kilometres east of Peronne, in Picardy. The extension to the town's own cemetery was actually begun by German troops but, after the village was retaken by the British in September 1918, was developed in the next two months by the British casualty clearing stations.

Harry made his will on 19th December 1917⁵, witnessed by his company commander Capt William J. Chalmers, in which he left 'all my property and effects' to his father, George Sheldon. He had been quite an eligible bachelor, leaving £6,159 which equates to almost £200,000 at today's values.'

– Graham Snowdon⁶ (related to the Sheldons through the Storm family via Harry's sister, Edith)

Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry

Harry Sheldon's attestation paper (an official document signed on enlistment) indicates he initially signed up with the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry (SRY), a local territorial force (cavalry) at Retford, in November 1914. At this early stage of the war, the SRY were split in to 2 lines: 1st Line (for service overseas) and 2nd Line (for those unable or unwilling to serve overseas). Harry's paper was for 'One Year's Embodied Service at Home'. However,

⁴ Although Harry Sheldon enlisted in 1914, his actual time on the Western Front was 9 months (281 days)

⁵ The date Harry made his will coincides with his posting to France

⁶ See sources page for the link

on the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry Roll of Honour, Harry is listed as serving with the 1/1st Battalion, indicating he transferred across after his initial training to the 2nd/1st SRY who were based in England.

2/1st SRY

- Formed as a Second-Line regiment in September 1914.
 - March 1915 : under orders of 2/1st Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire Mounted Brigade.
 - By June 1915 : has moved to King's Lynn and brigade now under 2/2nd Mounted Division.
 - March 1916 : formation titles changed to 9th Mounted Brigade and 3rd Mounted Division.
 - July 1916 : division changed title again to 1st Mounted Division. Regiment now in 1st Mounted Brigade and had moved to Thorndon Park near Brentwood (Essex).
 - August 1917: converted to a cyclist unit and under orders of 11th Cyclist Brigade in Cyclist Division in Canterbury (Kent) area.

Sgt Sheldon's uniform on the photograph indicates he was already a sergeant in the SRY by the time he transferred to the Sherwood Foresters on 19th December 1917. He was posted to France on 25th December 1917 and 'in the field' with the 1/6th Battalion from 29th January 1917. He was awarded the Victory medal and British Medal. This further indicates he was not involved in combat during 1915 or he would also have been eligible for the 1915 Star medal as well.

Action of 1/6th Battalion Sherwood Foresters in September 1918

The 1/6th were part of the 139th Brigade/46th North Midlands Division under General H Rawlinson (1864-1925). At the end of September, they were involved in several battles on the Somme which were collectively known as the **Battles of the Hindenburg Line**.

Sgt Sheldon's battalion, along with the 1/5th 1/7th and 1/8th Sherwood Foresters, the 1/4th Black Watch, 139th Trench Mortar Battery and 1/3rd London battalions, were preparing for a push on Ramicourt, which meant crossing the St Quentin Canal. Lt Colonel William B Vann (1887 – 1918) was in charge of the 1/6th.

However, Sgt Sheldon was fated not to participate. The *Newark Advertiser* reported he and three other comrades were killed '*while asleep in a dugout*' on the 26th, three days before the offensive began.'

Dugouts

'Dug-outs, usually sited close to the trench line - often within or below the trench wall - were used as a form of underground shelter and rest for both troops and officers. Occupants of dug-outs would eat their meals, arrange meetings and often make their bed there.'

Dug-outs were considered much safer than resting or lying in the open since they afforded some form of protection against not only the weather but, far more critically, from enemy shell-fire. However, it was not unusual for direct shell hits to burrow through to dug-outs, killing or maiming all occupants. Dug-outs generally took one of three forms. Those which enabled one, possibly two, men to rest in some discomfort within the trench wall were termed 'cubby-holes' or 'funk-holes'. Propped up by wooden posts and corrugated iron and somewhat deeper, 'Shelters' gave protection to a rather larger number of men.



Image of a dugout 1917 IWM NO: E AUS 661

However, the best form of dug-out were the 'Deep' variety and were almost exclusively used by senior officers. Deep dug-outs were entered via a stairway stretching up to 10 feet below ground. Within the dug-out were housed one or more rooms used for meetings as well as rest and relaxation. Electric lights were often installed in such dug-outs as was wire bedding.

The entrance to the dugout would often be draped with a gas curtain to keep out enemy gas. Such protection could work both ways however; a soldier who entered the dug-out in the aftermath of a gas attack could carry the remnants of gas on his boots. The gas curtain would then prevent the gas escaping; it was not uncommon for all men in a dug-out to be gassed while sleeping as the result of gas inadvertently brought in by a colleague.'

- Michael Duffy, First World War.com

Thursday 26th September 1918

| | |
|-----------|--|
| 2nd Bn. | Private, 72941, F. Maynard |
| 1/6th Bn. | Sergeant, 204788, H. Sheldon |
| 1/6th Bn. | Sergeant, 107144, James Coxon Walker |
| 1/6th Bn. | Private, 242621, D. G. Wardman |
| 1/6th Bn. | Private, 48594, R. Watson |
| 1/8th Bn. | Corporal, 269872, James William Elcock |
| 1/8th Bn. | Private, 307443, Wallace John Phippard |
| 16th Bn. | Private, 26036, Stanley Charles John Thorp |
| 17th Bn. | Lance Corporal, 31073, G. Hardy |

Above: Extract from the Sherwood Foresters Roll of Honour website showing the casualties on Thursday 26th September 1918. Another sergeant, James Walker and two privates: Wardman and Watson, reveal the names of those who died alongside Harry 'whilst asleep in a dugout.'

1918 was a particularly torrid time for the entire regiment with a total death toll of 3, 145 and a shocking 958 of those in one month – March.

Sheldon's commanding officer, Lt Col Vann, described by General Allenby as 'the most fearless Officer he had ever met,'⁷ was killed on October 3rd earning him a Victoria Cross – the only Church of England clergyman to do so⁸ - in the process.

From the Newark Advertiser:

Monday 30 September 1918: The deepest sorrow spread throughout Collingham as it became known that the sad news has been received from a Sherwood Foresters officer in France that Sergeant Harry Sheldon, 27, had been killed...

Harry was the youngest son of farmer George Sheldon, a widower. He spent all his life in Collingham, where he was extremely popular, until he voluntarily joined the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry in 1915⁹. He earned promotion to Sergeant and was transferred to the Sherwoods in September 1917 before proceeding overseas. Sgt 204788 Sheldon is remembered in the Roisel Cemetery Extension close to Peronne in the Somme.¹⁰

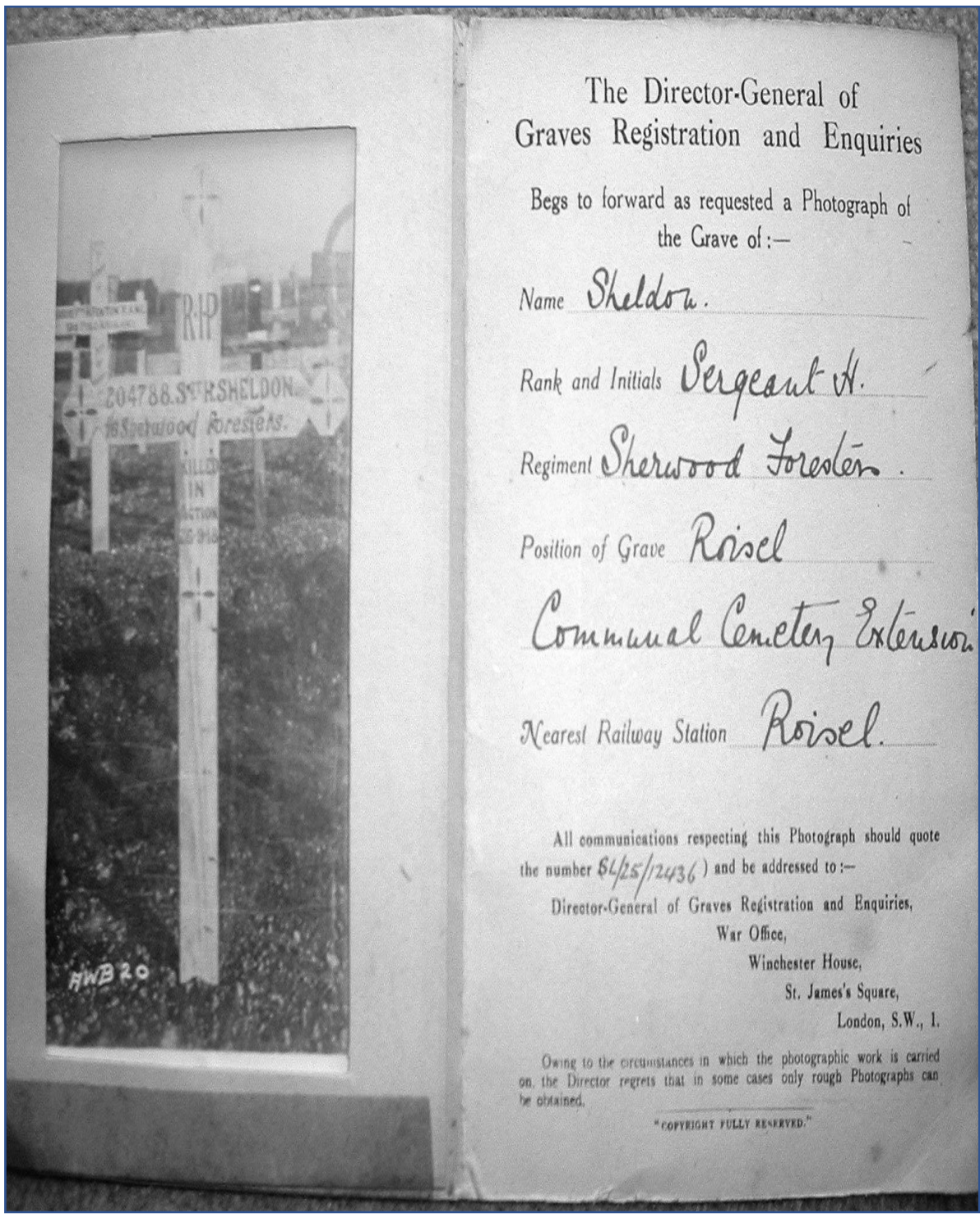
- ❶ **Sgt Harry Sheldon is buried at Roisel Cemetery Extension close to Peronne. Plot: II J 15**
- ❷ His inscription reads:
'Greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his life for his friend.'
- ❸ ***Harry Sheldon is also remembered on his parents' grave in All Saints Churchyard***
- ❹ ***North Collingham War Memorial Cross and Parishioners' Plaque***
- ❺ ***The Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry Roll of Honour in St Swithun's Church, Retford***

⁷ P 237 The Sherwood Foresters in the Great War Capt. W C C Weetman published by Dodo Press

⁸ Source on Vann: Wikipedia. See also Col. Weetman (of the 1/10th SF) War Diary for a full explanation.

⁹ Harry Sheldon's age on his attestation paper is given as 21 yrs 11months – this would be 1914? The year is indecipherable on the paper. However, the Retford HQ was established in 1915. A conundrum!

¹⁰ See Trevor Frecknall's book 'Collingham and District in The Great War' p 131

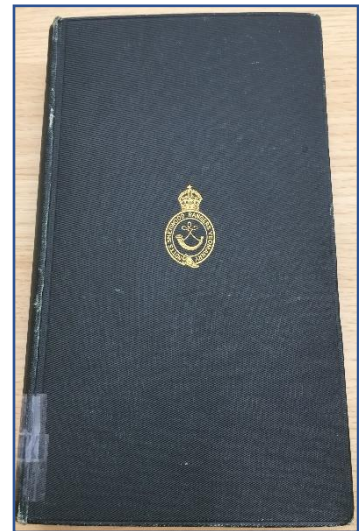


Above: A leaflet showing Sgt Sheldon's original burial place in Roisel Communal Cemetery Extension with his wooden battlecross. When the Commonwealth War Graves Commission began to replace the wooden crosses with stone headstones families were given the option of having the cross sent to them provided they covered postage. Photo c/o Colin Storm

Sources:

- Ancestry.co.uk – this provides Sgt Sheldon’s full military service history (official documents Ref: WO 363)
- East Trent Genealogy database
- Our Nottinghamshire website:
- Link to Harry Sheldon’s piece by Graham Snowdon:
http://www.ournottinghamshire.org.uk/page/sgt_harry_sheldon_of_collingham
- Link to The Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry Regimental Association website here:
<http://sherwoodrangers.org.uk/roll-of-honour/4580429553>
- North Collingham Infants’ School Admissions Book is held in Nottinghamshire Archives
- Nottinghamshire County Council Roll of Honour database
- A Roll of Honour to the Sherwood Foresters:
<http://www.the-sherwood-foresters.co.uk/index.html>
- BOOK: Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry in the Great War by Maj. H Tallents DSO Ref:L35.29 published 1926. An original copy is available to read in Newark Library (pictured right)

Both Harry Sheldon and fellow Sherwood Ranger Harold Millns (died Dec 14th 1916) are mentioned in the Roll of Honour



With thanks to Graham Snowdon, Colin Storm and Tim Sheldon for their useful information on Sgt Harry Sheldon and permission to use photographs.

VISIT:

St Swithun’s Church, Cannon Square, Retford to see the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry Roll of Honour: <http://www.stswithuns.retfordteamministry.org.uk/pages/homepage.htm>

Contact the churchwarden, John Coates, at St Swithun’s for opening times



HP 6/9/2018

