

Name of Soldier: **Priestley, Leonard**  
**Rank:** Lance Corporal  
**Regiment:** 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion Sherwood Foresters 'W'  
 Co.  
**Service No:** 16630



Date of birth	Date died of wounds sustained in August (25 <sup>th</sup> )	Age
23 <sup>rd</sup> Nov 1893	6 <sup>th</sup> October 1917	23

### Background: Leonard Priestley

There were many branches of the Priestley family going back several generations in Collingham. However, although born in North Collingham, Herbert's father, William (1846 - 1922), left to find work in Newark when he was younger. In 1881 he and his wife Hannah née Clark<sup>1</sup> (1857-1940) were in Hawton where William was an agricultural labourer. Ten years later he was a labourer in a plaster pit on Farndon Road. They moved back to Collingham sometime after 1897. By the 1901 census they were living on Dykes End, S Collingham<sup>2</sup> and were still there in 1911.

#### 1911 Census

Reveals that William and Hannah had 3 surviving children (of 5), all born in Hawton:

Alice (1881 – 1953)

Herbert b 1887

Leonard b 1893

William, at 63, is still working (now as an agricultural labourer). Herbert (24) was a farm horseman in South Collingham and **Leonard (17)**, worked as a groom for Dr Frank Broadbent in the Old Hall. Alice (30) is in domestic service. After Dr Broadbent's untimely death in 1915<sup>3</sup>, Leonard went to work for John Wigram, at The Manor, South Collingham. However, according to one source<sup>4</sup> he was living in Newark when he enlisted. He was engaged to be married to 'Lil' (see p 5).

<sup>1</sup> According to information on the N CC Roll of Honour database

<sup>2</sup> Thought to be one of the cottages between number 18-24 Dykes End

<sup>3</sup> See Dr Frank Broadbent's obituary in CDLHS archives

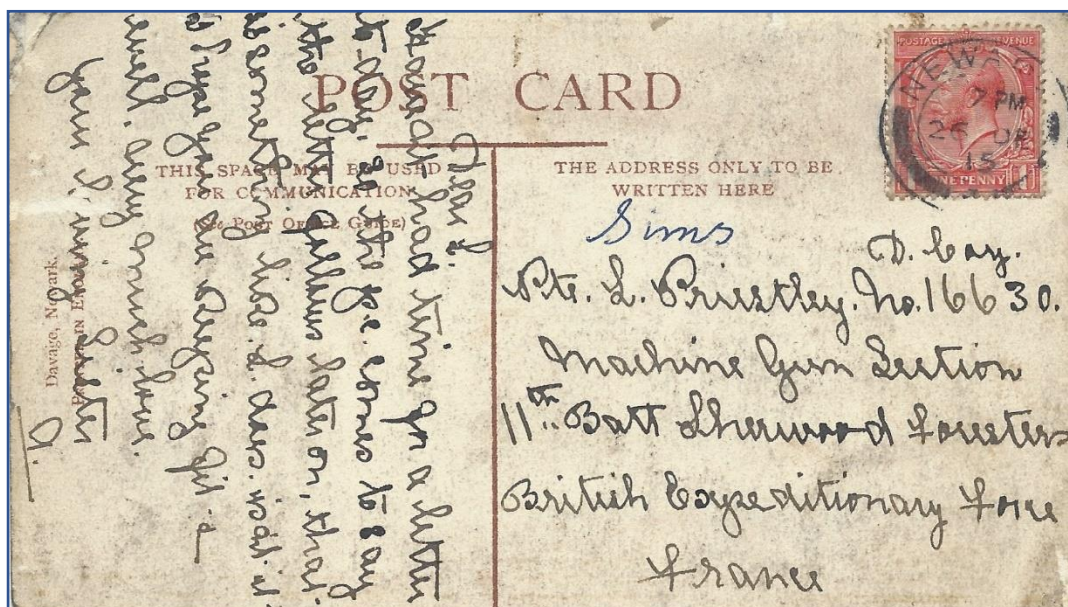
<sup>4</sup> Nottinghamshire County Council Roll of Honour website

## Military History: Lance-Corporal Leonard Priestley

Leonard enlisted in the Sherwood Foresters (Notts & Derby) in Hucknall at the outbreak of war in Sept 1914. A postcard from his sister Alice, recently donated to Collingham Archives<sup>5</sup> is addressed to Pte L Priestley Machine Gun Section, 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion Sherwood Foresters suggesting he was with this battalion initially. His medal index card shows he was mobilized to France on the 27<sup>th</sup> August 1915.

### 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Service) Sherwood Foresters (Notts and Derby)

- Formed at Derby in September 1914 & came under orders of 70th Brigade in 23rd Division.
- Moved to Stanhope Lines at Aldershot in December 1914.
- Moved to Shorncliffe in February 1915 and went on in May to Bordon. Landed at Boulogne 27 August 1915.



Above: A post card sent to Leonard in France from his sister Alice in December 1915. Source: Malcolm Barnard Collection (since donated to Collingham Archives)

At some stage Leonard was transferred to the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion Sherwood Foresters, known as 'The Bantams.' They were part of the 105<sup>th</sup> Brigade 35<sup>th</sup> Division:

*The 15th (Nottingham) Battalion, Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment) was raised at Nottingham in February 1915, by the Mayor and a Committee, as a Bantam Battalion, from troops who were under the normal regulation minimum height of 5 feet 3 inches. After initial training close to home, they joined 105th Brigade in 35th Division at Masham, North Yorkshire in June 1915. The Division moved to Salisbury Plain for final training in August. They were ordered to Egypt in late 1915, but the order was*

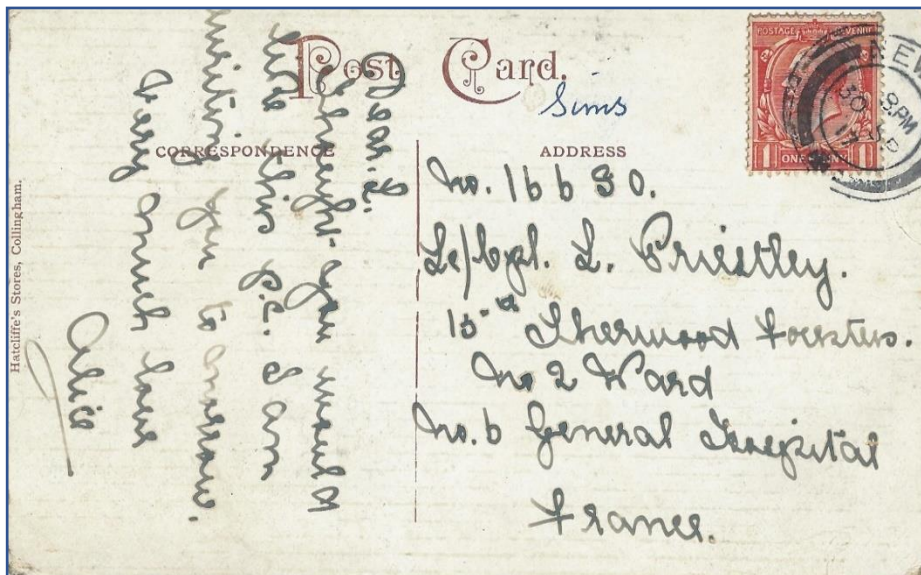
<sup>5</sup> Postcard donated by Mr Malcolm Barnard Feb 2018

soon cancelled and they proceeded to France on the 1st of February 1916, and the division concentrated east of St Omer. They were in action during the Battles of the Somme at Bazentin Ridge, Arrow Head Copse, Maltz Horn Farm and Falfemont Farm. The division received new drafts of men to replace losses suffered on the Somme, but the CO [commanding officer]. soon discovered that these new recruits were not of the same physical standard as the original Bantams, being men of small stature from the towns, rather than the miners and farm workers who had joined up in 1915.<sup>6</sup>

There is nothing to suggest Leonard Priestley was 5'3" or under.

In August 1917, the 35th Division were back in the line, near the village of **Epehy**, in the Somme *Departement*, in the St. Quentin/Cambrian area. On August 21<sup>st</sup> they were involved in trying to capture 'The Knoll', a vantage point near Guillemont Farm. Although successful, the raid came at a price, with 27 killed, 51 wounded and 5 missing. However, the enemy wasn't ready to relinquish The Knoll and on the 25<sup>th</sup> the battalion was heavily bombarded. That day's toll was 19 killed and 44 wounded. Guillemont Farm was recaptured by the Germans and The Knoll was lost on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

Lance Corporal Priestley was possibly one of the 44 wounded on August 25<sup>th</sup>. The nature of his injuries was so severe he had to have both legs amputated. Another postcard from Alice, this time to 'No 2 Ward, No 6 General Hospital<sup>7</sup>, France' is dated 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1917, a week before he died. 'I thought you would like this post card,' she wrote. 'I am writing you tomorrow. Very much love, Alice.' The post card showed a picture of St John the Baptist Church. For Leonard, a regular worshipper at the church, this would have been a poignant reminder of home.



Above: A post card to Lt/Cpl Priestley in hospital from his sister Alice. Source: Malcolm Barnard Collection

Leonard died on October 6<sup>th</sup>, six weeks after his courageous endeavours on The Knoll.

<sup>6</sup> [www.wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/allied/sherwoodforesters15.php#sthash.HhhDocTg.dpdf](http://www.wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/allied/sherwoodforesters15.php#sthash.HhhDocTg.dpdf)

<sup>7</sup> No 6 General Hospital was in Rouen, France. The town was the base for several hospitals as it was situated further away from the rudimentary 'clearing stations' close to the front line. The hospitals were run by Royal Army Medical Corps.



## Newspaper Tribute

The following is an extract from Trevor Frecknall's book 'Collingham during the Great War' p99:

**Monday 8 October 1917:** *Only four days after receiving a cheery letter from their son Leonard, William and Hannah Priestley at Dykes End, Collingham, received an altogether different missive. He had been killed, aged 23. He sang in the South Collingham Church choir as both boy and man. He worked for the late Dr Broadbent<sup>8</sup> for four and a half years and then for J Wigram before enlisting in October 1914. He suffered a back wound in October 1916 but returned to the battlefield again on 27 December, only to be wounded again on 25 August 1917. He had been in hospital ever since. Doctors tried to save his life by amputating both of his legs, after which he wrote his optimistic letter, which his parents received on Thursday 4 October. But he passed away on Saturday 6 October.'*

## Rev Maxwell's Tribute

In his November 1917 newsletter (right), the Rector of South Collingham, Rev. Albert Maxwell, provides further details about Leonard's character:

*'Another member of our Roll of Honour, Leonard Priestley, has made the supreme sacrifice as the result of wounds sustained on the Western Front at the end of the month of August last. As he continued to live for six weeks after receiving his severe wounds his friends hoped that his life might yet be spared, although the grave reports from the War Office, at frequent intervals, gave little hope of this, and on Monday, October 8<sup>th</sup>, his parents were informed that he had succumbed to his injuries.*

*Leonard Priestley was a lad of sterling character, being steady reliable and painstaking in everything he undertook to do. These characteristics were observable all through his life, in the Sunday School, in the Choir, in his preparation for Confirmation, and in his everyday occupation. He was much esteemed by his employers, both the late Dr Broadbent, for whom he worked for 4 ½ years and Mr John Wigram<sup>9</sup> in whose employ he was in the 2 years before he joined the army in the autumn of 1914. Always a*

### In Memoriam

Another member of our Roll of Honour, Leonard Priestley, has made the supreme sacrifice as the result of wounds sustained on the Western front at the end of the month of August last. As he continued to live for six weeks after receiving his severe wounds his friends hoped that his life might yet be spared, although the grave reports of his condition furnished by the War Office at frequent intervals gave but little hope of this, and on Monday, October 8<sup>th</sup>, his parents were informed that he had succumbed to his injuries.

Leonard Priestley was a lad of sterling character, being steady reliable, and painstaking in everything he undertook to do. These characteristics were observable all through his life, in the Sunday School, in the Choir, in his preparation for Confirmation, and in his everyday occupation. He was much esteemed by his employers, both the late Dr. Broadbent for whom he worked 4½ years, and Mr. John Wigram in whose employ he was for the two years before he joined the army in the autumn of 1914. Always a regular Churchgoer and Communicant in times of peace, he did not neglect these sacred customs in time of war whenever opportunity occurred. He was a christian soldier of whom we are proud and for whom we mourn. R.I.P.

Just as this month's number of the Parish Magazine is going to press news has come to hand that Herbert Priestley (Leonard's only brother) has been missing since the battle of September 26<sup>th</sup>. The greatest sympathy of us all will be with the Priestley family in this time of great sorrow and anxiety.

<sup>8</sup> Dr Frank Broadbent, The Old Hall. Died Jan 31<sup>st</sup> 1915

<sup>9</sup> Mr John Wigram, land agent, of The Manor, Low Street

*regular churchgoer and Communicant in times of peace, he did not neglect these sacred customs in the war whenever opportunity occurred. He was a Christian soldier of whom we are proud and of whom we mourn. RIP.'*

This was followed by more bad news:

*'Just as this month's number of the Parish Magazine is going to press news has come to hand that Herbert Priestley (Leonard's only brother) has been missing since the battle of September 26<sup>th</sup>. The greatest sympathy of us all will be with the Priestley family in this time of great sorrow and anxiety.'*<sup>10</sup> (in fact, Herbert died ten days before Leonard).

A year later, an anguished notice appeared in the Newark Advertiser from 'Dad, Mam, Alice and fiancée, Lill:

'Dead!; Did you say? Nay, only Heaven-spied;  
Just safe in God's home-port – they are not dead!  
Lost did you think? How could such lives be lost?  
Just gathered up; his jewels, rare of cost!  
Gone? Nay, just waiting on God's wide shore-line.  
The coming of life vessels – yours and mine.' (Source: T Frecknall p 100)

**Lance Corporal L Priestley is buried in the St Sever Extension, Rouen, France Plot: P3 D 4B His headstone, like his brother Herbert's, reads 'Duty Nobly Done.'**

**Leonard Priestley is remembered on the St John Baptist Roll of Honour and Parishioners' Plaque War Memorial.**

#### Acknowledgements & Sources

- With thanks to Malcolm Barnard for his donation of Alice Priestley's postcards now held in the Jubilee Room, Swinderby Road, Collingham, and for his help in researching the circumstances of Lc/Cpl Priestley's death.
- Trevor Frecknall 'Collingham during the Great War' page 99 published 2015
- South Collingham Parish Newsletters c/o Collingham and District Local History Society
- Mrs E Allwood and Mr D Johnson for helping to locate the Priestleys' cottage on Dykes End.



*Above: 18 Dykes End. It is thought the Priestleys lived here. The property was rented from Mr Walter Holland, grocer, at the time. Alice and her widowed mother lived on Dykes End for several years after the war.*

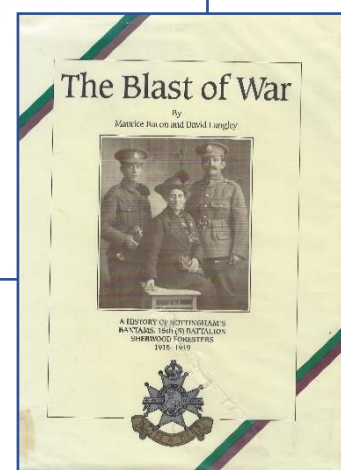
<sup>10</sup> Original Parish Magazine Newsletter Nov 1917 in Box B CDLHS (Jubilee Room)

- Book: *The Blast of War - a History of Nottingham's Bantams, 15th (Service) Battalion Sherwood Foresters, 1915-1919* by Maurice Bacon & David Langley. (Published by Sherwood Press Nottingham Ltd, 1986). Available to borrow from Newark Library Ref: L.35.22

**APPENDIX B**  
**Substantial Other Rank Losses & Drafts,  
15th (S) Battalion, Sherwood Foresters**

MONTH	NUMBER	NOTES
FEB 1916	994	arrived in France.
MAY 1916	-72	heavy losses recorded.
JULY 1916	-366	heavy losses recorded.
OCT 1916	-28	casualties in a raid.
JAN 1917		new draft added.
MAY 1917	-50	casualties from one company.
AUG 1917	-85	casualties.
OCT 1917	-213	casualties.
OCT 1917		reorganisation.
NOV 1917	+?	draft added.
FEB 1918	+100	draft added.
MAR 1918	-458	Casualties since 24 March. (very few survivors from front two companies).
APR 1918	-112	casualties. (reduced to two companies for a few days).
APR 1918	+350	draft added.
JAN 1919	-229	demobilized.
JAN 1919	300	sent to CALAIS to control riot.
FEB 1919	208	strength.
MAR 1919	-46	demobilized on 1st.
MAR 1919	169	strength.
APR 1919		Battalion cadre only.

Source: Battalion War Diary. Figures cannot be reconciled in some cases with Appendix D.



Above: Table of Casualties of the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion Sherwood Foresters from Bacon and Langley's 'The Blast of War' (right) Casualties for August 1917, when Priestley was injured were 85. Those for October, when he died of his wounds, were 213, leading to reorganisation of the battalion and the need for drafting in more men. March 1918, when the Germans were on a major offensive 'Operation Michael' record the highest losses of that period.

HP 1/4/2018

