

## **Private Richard Westfield**

**Regimental number: 6518**

**8th Battalion, The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment)**

**born: 1892 - died: 30 April 1916**

Private Richard Westfield was probably born in the spring of 1892 in King's Lynn, Norfolk.<sup>1</sup> He was the son of Henry and Sarah Elizabeth Westfield.<sup>2</sup> Henry was born in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire in about 1858 and Sarah Elizabeth (née Porter) in the same year, in King's Lynn. Henry and Sarah Elizabeth were married in King's Lynn in 1877.<sup>3</sup> They had eleven children, eight of whom survived until 1911 and one who died after 1911.<sup>4</sup> The children included six sons and five daughters: Robert Henry (born in about 1878),<sup>5</sup> Hannah Elizabeth (born in about 1879 and died on 18 February 1893),<sup>6</sup> Ellen (born in about 1881),<sup>7</sup> Abel Charles (born in about 1882),<sup>8</sup> Walter (born in about 1884 but died in 1889),<sup>9</sup> Edward (born in about 1886),<sup>10</sup> Frank William (born in about 1888),<sup>11</sup> Ada Sarah (born in about 1890),<sup>12</sup> Richard, Maggie (born in about 1894 and died in 1913)<sup>13</sup> and Agnes Ann (born in about 1896).<sup>14</sup>

Richard's father, Henry, was a carpenter and, in 1911, Henry and his son were both carpenters in King's Lynn. The family lived at 38 Sir Lewis Street.<sup>15</sup>

Richard enlisted in The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment) in Guildford, Surrey, while he was living in Chertsey, Surrey.<sup>16</sup> In April 1916 the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion of his regiment was stationed near Dranoutre, Belgium.<sup>17</sup> The Battalion's tour in the trenches between 27 - 29 April was generally quiet, with the exception of machine gun and rifle fire at night. However, the Battalion was on gas alert the whole time as the wind was generally from the east. Enemy deserters and prisoners of war reported the presence of gas in the German trenches. At 12.40 a.m. on 30 April there were rapid bursts of enemy machine gun fire and then at 12.45 a.m. "Gas was released in dense clouds and swept all over the Brigade front lasting until 2 a.m. Our machine guns swept the enemy parapet with the intention of piercing any gas cylinders."<sup>18</sup> Enemy parties attempted, and at one point succeeded, in entering the trenches. They were repulsed with bomb attacks. The gas had passed over by 2 a.m. but the Battalion suffered 110 casualties, mainly because of the gas. "Very little warning was given of the arrival of gas as the enemy's machine gun fire successfully deafened the noise of egress from the pipes."<sup>19</sup>

Richard was likely injured in this gas attack because he died shortly afterwards<sup>20</sup> at the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Casualty Clearing Station. The effects of the gas attacks were also felt at No. 1 CCCS, stationed near Bailleul,<sup>21</sup> which was just about five miles from Dranoutre. Richard lost four comrades from his battalion in the few days at the end of April and beginning of May: Private Elvin Harry Davis, Private Harry Ernest Homer, Private James Taylor, and Corporal William Osborn Bush. Most of his comrades had been poisoned by chlorine gas.

Richard was a member of the Church of England and was buried in the Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord (Plot II. Row D, Grave 136).<sup>22</sup> Bailleul is in France, close to the Belgian border. It was occupied on 14 October 1914 and became an important railhead, air depot and hospital centre. Several Casualty Clearing Stations, including No. 1 Canadian, were quartered there for considerable periods. The earliest Commonwealth burials at Bailleul were made in April 1915. An extension was built and burials continued until April 1918, and occurred again in September and after the Armistice, when graves were brought in from the neighbouring battlefields.<sup>23</sup>

A letter notifying her of his death was sent to his mother who was still living on Sir Lewis Street in King's Lynn.<sup>24</sup> She also received the monies owing to him from the army after his death.<sup>25</sup>

Richard was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914–15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).<sup>26</sup>

Richard is honoured on the King's Lynn war memorial, located in Greyfriars Gardens next to the public library.<sup>27</sup> There is no evidence that his brothers served in the Great War. However, his eldest brother, Robert, had served previously with the army. He enlisted as a Private in the Norfolk militia in March 1896 at the age of 17. He was discharged when he completed his engagement in March 1902.

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<sup>1</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 August 2015), entry for Richard Westfield, Registration district: King's Lynn, Inferred County: Norfolk, Volume: 4b, Page: 337

<sup>2</sup> "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 August 2015), entry for Richard Westfield, Registration district: Kings Lynn, Registration District Number: 236, Sub-registration district: North Kings Lynn, ED, institution, or vessel: 1, Household schedule number: 258, Piece: 11639

<sup>3</sup> "England & Wales marriages 1837-2008," *findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 7 August 2015), entry for Henry Westfield, District: Kings Lynn, County: Norfolk, Volume: 4B, Page: 519

<sup>4</sup> The 1911 census indicates that they had eleven children, three of whom had died. However, twelve children, including four who died, have been identified as likely being the children of Henry and Sarah Elizabeth.

<sup>5</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 16 August 2015), entry for Robert Henry Westfield, Registration district: King's Lynn, Inferred County: Norfolk, Volume: 4b, Page: 345

<sup>6</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 16 August 2015), entry for Hannah Elizabeth Westfield, Registration district: King's Lynn, Inferred County: Norfolk, Volume: 4b, Page: 353; "England, Select Deaths and Burials, 1538-1991," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 16 August 2015), entry for Hannah Elizabeth Westfield, Death Place: Lynn, Norfolk, England, FHL Film Number: 1471537, Reference ID: P 139 L 1107

<sup>7</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 16 August 2015), entry for Ellen Westfield, Registration district: King's Lynn, Inferred County: Norfolk, Volume: 4b, Page: 359

<sup>8</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 16 August 2015), entry for Abel Charles Westfield, Registration district: King's Lynn, Inferred County: Norfolk, Volume: 4b, Page: 341

<sup>9</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 16 August 2015), entry for Walter Westfield, Registration district: King's Lynn, Inferred County: Norfolk, Volume: 4b, Page: 960; "England, Select Deaths and Burials, 1538-1991," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 16 August 2015), entry for Walter Westfield, Death Place: Lynn, Norfolk, England, FHL Film Number: 1471537, Reference ID: p 72 l 574

<sup>10</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 16 August 2015), entry for Edward Westfield, Registration district: Spadling, Inferred County: Lincolnshire, Volume: 7a, Page: 419

<sup>11</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 16 August 2015), entry for Frank William Westfield, Registration district: Spadling, Inferred County: Lincolnshire, Volume: 7a, Page: 360

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- <sup>12</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 16 August 2015), entry for Ada Sarah Westfield, Registration district: King's Lynn, Inferred County: Norfolk, Volume: 4b, Page: 335
- <sup>13</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 16 August 2015), entry for Maggie Westfield, Registration district: King's Lynn, Inferred County: Norfolk, Volume: 4b, Page: 340; "England & Wales, FreeBMD Death Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 21 January 2015), entry for Maggie Westfield, Registration district: King's Lynn, Inferred County: Norfolk, Volume: 4b, Page: 383
- <sup>14</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 16 August 2015), entry for Agnes Ann Westfield, Registration district: King's Lynn, Inferred County: Norfolk, Volume: 4b, Page: 316
- <sup>15</sup> "1911 England Census," entry for Richard Westfield
- <sup>16</sup> "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 7 August 2015), entry for Richard Westfield
- <sup>17</sup> "UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914–1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 7 August 2015), Regiment or unit: Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment, sub unit: 8th Battalion, Division: 24th Division, Diary dates: 1915 Aug 1–1916 Aug 31, Piece description: Piece 2214/1-5: 72 Infantry Brigade: 8 Battalion Queen's (Royal West Surrey) (1915 Aug - 1918 Jan), Piece number: 2214
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> The No. 1 CCCS journal and the army's record of the disposition of soldiers' effect report that he died on 30 April 1916. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the army's record of deaths in the Great War report that he died on 1 May.
- <sup>21</sup> "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* ([http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202\\_e.html&r=1&f=G](http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G); accessed 17 June 2015)
- <sup>22</sup> "Commonwealth War Graves Commission," ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org); accessed 29 July 2015), entry for Westfield, R., Service No: 6518
- <sup>23</sup> "Bailleul Communal Cemetery, Nord," Commonwealth War Graves Commission (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2000047/Bailleul%20Communal%20Cemetery.%20Nord>; accessed 5 August 2015)
- <sup>24</sup> "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Record number 64
- <sup>25</sup> "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 7 August 2015), entry for Richard Westfield
- <sup>26</sup> "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 7 August 2015), entry for Richard Westfield
- <sup>27</sup> "King's Lynn War Memorial," Roll of Honour (<http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Norfolk/KingsLynn.html>; accessed 17 August 2015)