

Private George Fenwick[©]
Regimental number: 26699
"D" Company, 2nd Battalion, Yorkshire Regiment

born: 1891 - died: 2 June 1918

Private George Fenwick was the son of Thomas Fenwick and the former Sarah Coxon. Both his parents were born in County Durham—Thomas on 22 February 1860¹ and Sarah about two years later.² They married on 1 September 1883 in Shildon, Durham,³ and had six children:

- A daughter born in about 1884, but died so soon after birth that she was not given a name,⁴
- James (born in 1886),⁵
- Michael (born in 1888),⁶
- George (born in 1891),⁷
- Frances Ann (born on 18 December 1894)⁸ and
- Elizabeth (born in 1900 but died the same year).⁹

In 1891, the family was living on Chapel Row, in Trimdon, Durham.¹⁰ Trimdon includes the towns of Trimdon, Trimdon Grange and Trimdon Colliery—coal mining communities located about 10 miles west of Hartlepool. Thomas was a deputy overman working in a colliery; he was probably a supervisor in charge of a section or district of a mine, and all employees working there.¹¹ Over the years, he and his family would depend on the coal mines for their living.

Sadly, Sarah died, at the age of 38, probably a few months after the birth of her last child in 1900.¹² In 1901, Thomas, a widower, was living on Lord Street in Wingate, just a few miles from Trimdon. His mother-in-law, Frances Coxon, also a widow, was living with him—perhaps to help him raise his four children under the age of 16.¹³ By then, Thomas's eldest son James was a screenman, working above ground and responsible for screening the size of coal produced at a mine.¹⁴

Three years later Thomas married Frances Hannah Hedley¹⁵ (born on 26 August 1868)¹⁶ and together they had two children: Edward John (born on 6 April 1906)¹⁷ and Norman (born in 1912).¹⁸ In 1911, Thomas and Frances were living at 1 South View in Deaf Hill, near Trindon Colliery, where George, age 20, was now a blacksmith, working above ground in the colliery.¹⁹

George enlisted in the British Expeditionary Force in about March 1916²⁰ in Stockton-on-Tees.²¹ He served in the 2nd Battalion of the Yorkshire Regiment, also known as Alexandra, The Princess of Wales's Own Yorkshire Regiment. This regiment was part of the 23rd Infantry Brigade of the 8th Division of the British army.

The days leading up to George's death were not a great overall success for the British. On 22 May 1918, the battalion returned to the front line.²² Between 22 and 26 May, patrols were sent out to report on enemy positions in preparation for a possible raid. On 23 May, one patrol encountered an enemy patrol and a fight ensued, during which two men were wounded and three went missing. The next day, the battalion maintained a lookout to see that the enemy did not remove the bodies of the enemy soldiers killed the previous day. Then, at dusk, one body was brought in and a letter found in the German soldier's pocket was the only identification found. Later the letter and some shoulder straps found on the wire were sent to the 23rd Infantry Brigade headquarters.

On 26 May, the battalion received word of a possible enemy attack that night. About 1 a.m., there was heavy bombardment with high explosives and gas shells on the battalion's position, which lasted about four hours, in preparation for the attack. The battalion had to withdraw from its previous line and await the enemy attack. At 4.30 a.m. the attack came and the enemy came over in large numbers. Although the battalion was at a disadvantage because the soldiers had to wear box respirators as a result of the earlier gas attack, its machine gun and rifle fire inflicted serious losses on the enemy. That held up the enemy for a while, but it had penetrated the redoubt line on two sides and the battalion had to retreat to the support line. In the early morning, it appeared that the enemy was about to surround the brigade on all sides and, as a result, it withdrew to the base of Roucy Hill.

On 28 May the brigade fell back slowly, took up a position on the Vesle River and was joined by the remains of three divisions—the 25th, 50th and 8th. The soldiers held that position until the enemy crossed the river. Even with the help of French troops, the line was forced back to the south-east of Franscourt. That position was held until the morning of 29th when the French fell back and the position moved to north of Treston, where it was shelled with trench mortar and “a considerable number of casualties were sustained as there had not been time to dig in properly.”²³ About 5 p.m. the enemy delivered a determined attack and drove the line back to the bottom of the valley. By 30 May, what was left of the 8th Division had collected at Nanteuil.

It is not known how George was injured—likely at some point during these activities—but he was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 1 June 1918 with shrapnel wounds to his back. He died on 2 June and was buried the following day in Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 2, Row E, Grave No. 26) with the Canadian chaplain R. K. Lambert presiding.²⁴

Pernes British Military Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when No. 1 and No. 4 CCCSs came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.²⁵ George was one of 199 injured soldiers admitted to No 1. CCCS on 1 June 1918. In total, over 4,000 soldiers were admitted to this CCCS in the month of June and 82 died.²⁶

George's father requested the following inscription for his gravestone:

DEATH DIVIDES
BUT MEMORY CLINGS²⁷

George is also remembered on the war memorial in Deaf Hill (Trimdon Station), which used to be in the nearby St. Paul's Church, but is now located in the Trimdon Station Community Centre.²⁸

The chaplain at No. 1 CCCS sent a letter to George's next-of-kin. At the CCCS, she was identified as a friend, Miss C. Leybourne, living on Cuthbertson Street in Trimdon Foundry, Trimdon Colliery.²⁹ This may have been George's step-cousin Olive May Leybourne. George's stepmother Frances had an older sister Jane Hedley³⁰ who, in 1885, married William Leybourne in Easington.³¹ In 1911, William Leybourne, his wife Jane and their daughter Olive May were living at 31 Cuthbertson Street in Trimdon Foundry.³² Olive May was born in about 1900, making her about 18 when George died. No evidence of the birth of Olive May to William and Jane was found. As she would have been born when they were already in their 40s, perhaps she was an adopted daughter. This would mean that Olive was not a blood relative of George's, so perhaps the term “friend” to describe their relationship as next-of-kin indicated a romantic relationship, rather than a familial one.

After the war, George's father and his stepmother were still living in Trimdon Station.³³ In 1939, they were registered in the urban area of Easington, Durham, and Thomas was then a retired deputy coal miner. Their son Edward, a joiner and undertaker, was living with them, as well as Frances' nephew John Robinson.³⁴

It is not known what became of George's eldest brother James, but his brother Michael remained in the Trimdon area and worked in the mines. In 1911, he was a boarder in the home of Liddle Jackson in Trimdon Grange and was a bricklayer in the colliery.³⁵ In 1920, he married Charlotte Broomfield³⁶ and, in 1939, he was a coal mine pumpman working below ground and living at 5 Ash Grove in Easington.³⁷ He died in June 1971.³⁸

George's sister Frances was living with her aunt and uncle, Margaret and Ralph Robinson, at 5 Eazard Street in Stockton-on-Tees in 1911.³⁹ Frances' stepmother's older sister Margaret⁴⁰ had married Ralph Robinson in 1882.⁴¹ Frances married Stephen Hart in 1921⁴² and, in 1939, she and Stephen were living with at least two of their children at 15 Swale Road in Stockton.⁴³ They probably had four children⁴⁴ and the eldest, George, born on 18 May 1922, may have been named after his late uncle. Frances probably died in March 1980 in Cleveland, Yorkshire.⁴⁵

Little information was found about George's stepbrothers, Edward and Norman.

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³ "England, Select Marriages, 1538–1973," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 7 July 2018), entry for Sarah Coxon, FHL film number: 1514625

⁴ "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 July 2018) entry for Fenwick, — [female], Registration district: Stockton, Volume 10A, Page 102; "GRO online index–death," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 July 2018) entry for Fenwick, — [female], Registration district: Stockton, Volume 10A, Page 54

⁵ "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 July 2018) entry for Fenwick, James, Registration district: Stockton, Volume 10A, Page 102

⁶ "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 July 2018) entry for Fenwick, Michael, Registration district: Stockton, Volume 10A, Page 107

⁷ "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 July 2018) entry for Fenwick, George, Registration district: Stockton, Volume 10A, Page 118

⁸ "1939 Register," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 12 July 2018), entry for Frances Ann Hart, Ref: RG101/2821C/022/37, Letter code: FGHB

⁹ "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 July 2018) entry for Fenwick, Elizabeth, Registration district: Easington, Volume 10A, Page 488; "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 21 January 2018), entry for Elizabeth Fenwick, Registration district: Easington, Inferred county: Durham, Volume: 10a, Page: 302

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- ¹¹ "Mine Terminolog-Job descriptions.docx - Coal and " [sic], *People and Place/Coal and Community* (www.coalandcommunity.com/: accessed 9 July 2018)
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- ¹³ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 11 January 2018), entry for George Fenwick, Registration district: Bolton, Sub-registration district: Farnworth, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 06, Piece: 3600, Folio: 25, Page: 41, Household schedule number: 241
- ¹⁴ "Mine Terminolog-Job descriptions.docx" [sic]
- ¹⁵ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 November 2018), entry for Thomas Fenwick, Registration district: Stockton, Inferred county: Durham: 10a, Page: 142
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- ¹⁸ "GRO online index–birth," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 9 July 2018) entry for Fenwick, Norman, Registration district: Easington, Volume 10B, Page 335
- ¹⁹ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 7 July 2018), entry for George Fenwick Whittle, Registration district: Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Registration district number: 552, Sub-registration district: Wingate, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 23, Piece: 30015
- ²⁰ Based on "War Gratuity Calculator" (<https://wargratuity.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/gratuity-calculator/>: accessed 18 May 2017); "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 7 July 2018), entry for George Fenwick
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- ²² "UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 7 July 2018), Regiment or unit: Prince of Wales's Own (West Yorkshire) Regiment, Sub-unit: 2nd Battalion, Division: 8th Division, Piece description: Piece 1714/1-3: 23 Infantry Brigade: 2 Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (1914 Dec–1919 Jun), Piece number: 1714
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- ²⁴ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 5 July 2018), entry for Fenwick, J. [sic]
- ²⁵ "Pernes British Military Cemetery," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/11600/PERNES%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>: accessed 13 January 2015)
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- ³² "1911 England, Wales & Scotland Census," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 8 May 2018), entry for William Leybourn, Registration district: Easington, Registration district number: 552, Enumeration district: 24, District number: 24, Sub-district: Wingate, Sub-district number: 1, Census reference: RG14PN30016 RG78PN1734 RD552 SD1 ED24 SN70, RG78 code number: 1734, Piece number: 30016
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- ³⁷ "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 July 2018), entry for Michael Fenwick, Schedule number: 132, Sub-schedule Number: 1, Enumeration district: FHKW, Registration district: 552-4
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- ³⁹ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 12 July 2018), entry for Frances Ann Fenwick, Registration district: Stockton, Registration district number: 544, Sub-registration district: Stockton, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 15, Piece: 29561
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- ⁴² "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 11 July 2018), entry for Frances A. Fenwick, Registration district: Stockton, Inferred county: Durham, Volume: 10a, Page: 143
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