

Private Ernest Edwin Gumbrell©

Regimental number: 37370

2nd Battalion, Suffolk Regiment

born: fall 1897 – died: 22 April 1918

Ernest (as he was identified in the censuses) was probably just under 18 years of age when he enlisted with the Suffolk Regiment, serving his country for two and a half years before his death.

Ernest was the third of nine children of William Gumbrell and Frances Mary Berkshire. William had been born about 1865 in Wisborough Green, Sussex, England.¹ Frances had been born about 1872 in West Chiltington, Sussex, and they had married on 11 June 1894 in West Chiltington.²

William and Frances' first child, William George, was born on 22 February 1895 in West Chiltington. Like two of his brothers, William applied to serve in the Great War, in September 1914, but he was discharged on 6 November of that year as "not being likely to become an efficient soldier under para. 392(iii)(c) of the King's Regulations" as he had flat feet and slight hammer toes.³

The second son, Thomas Henry, was born on 16 July 1896 in West Chiltington. He too joined the war effort with the Royal Sussex Regiment. He survived the war, married and became an under-foreman of a mushroom dealer in a market.⁴ Regrettably, only about 30% of UK service records still exist, due to a fire resulting from a 1940 air raid on the Army Records Office in Walworth, London,⁵ and it appears that Thomas's records were not saved. As a result, specifics of his military experience were not obtainable.

Ernest was the next child, baptized on 5 December 1897 in West Chiltington.⁶

William and Frances' fourth son, Percy, lived a short four and a half years, having been baptized in West Chiltington on Christmas Eve 1899⁷ and dying in the fall of 1904.⁸

In 1901 the family was living in West Chiltington. William, then 36, was a baker shopkeeper working on his own account at home. The family included Frances, the four young boys and one servant.⁹

Four more children followed as the family continued to live in West Chiltington. In the summer of 1904, Elsie Jane was born,¹⁰ On 14 March 1906 another son, Albert Frederick, arrived.¹¹ Frances May was born in the first quarter of 1908 but sadly, died later that same summer.¹² Doris Elizabeth was born in the summer of 1909.¹³

In 1911 the family still resided in West Chiltington and William continued to be a baker on his own account. George and Thomas were helping in the bakery while the younger children were either in school or at home.¹⁴ The final child of William and Frances, Lilian Mary, was born in the fall of 1911.¹⁵

Unfortunately, it appears that Ernest's military records were destroyed in the 1940 fire of the War Records Office. Because Ernest received a war gratuity of £12,¹⁶ it is estimated that he enlisted in September 1915, when he would not quite have been 18 years old.¹⁷ The war gratuity was introduced in December 1918 as a payment to be made to those men who had served in WW I for a

period of at least six months, or for home service for any length of time if the man had served overseas.¹⁸

Ernest enlisted at Worthing and served with the 2nd Battalion, Suffolk Regiment.¹⁹ By referring to the war diary for the 3rd Division, 2nd Battalion, Suffolk Regiment, we may be able to shed some light on what Ernest was experiencing during his last month. During the early part of April they were able to withdraw from the fighting to rest and regroup, before once again returning to the fighting line. On the 11th they were busy preparing new defensive positions around the village of Hinges, France, and although this would have been behind the main fighting it was still dangerous, with heavy shelling and barrages being laid down by both sides. On the 20th, although it was recorded as a quiet day, there would have been more shelling; two Other Ranks were killed and six wounded. On the 22nd, a creeping barrage commenced at dawn.

On 22 April 1918, Ernest was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station suffering from shrapnel wounds to his face, left abdomen and left thigh. A casualty clearing station (CCS) is a military medical facility behind the front lines that is used to treat wounded soldiers. A CCS would usually be located just beyond the range of enemy artillery and often near transportation facilities (e.g., a railway). The CCS receives battlefield casualties from regimental aid posts located in the combat zone. Casualties that could not be adequately treated in the CCS were stabilized there before being transported to a field hospital or military hospital.²⁰

Sadly, Ernest passed away and was buried that same day at Pernes British Cemetery in Plot 1, Row D, Grave 6. Pernes British Cemetery was not opened until April 1918, when the 1st and 4th Canadian Casualty Clearing Stations pulled back to Pernes, driven back by the German advance in Flanders. There are 1,098 First World War burials in Pernes.²¹

It is unclear when Ernest's father passed away, but his war gratuity was paid to his sole legatee, his mother Frances, so it is assumed that Ernest was unmarried. Ernest's mother passed away in 1933 in Sussex, England.

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¹ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 February 2019), entry for William Gumbrell [sic], Registration district: Thakeham, Sub-registration district: Pulborough, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 9, Piece: 955, Folio: 79, Page: 3, Household schedule number: 17

² "England, Select Marriages, 1538–1973," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 February 2019), entry for William Gumbrell, FHL film number: 2147043, Reference ID: 44

³ "British Army WWI Pension Records 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 February 2019), entry for William George Gumbrill [sic], Regimental number: 3701, Form title: Short Service Attestation

⁴ "1939 Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 February 2019), entry for Thomas H Gumbrell, Residence place: Chanctonbury, Sussex, Schedule Number: 97, Enumeration district: ENAJ, Registration district: 83/1

⁵ "How to research a soldier," *The Long, Long Trail, The British Army in the Great War of 1914–1918* (<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/the-1940-fire-at-arnside-street/>: accessed 5 February 2019)

⁶ "England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538–1975," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 4 February 2019), entry for Ernest Edwin Gumbrell, FHL film number: 1040976

⁷ "England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538–1975," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 4 February 2019), entry for Percy John Gumbrell, FHL film number: 1040976

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- ⁸ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 February 2019), entry for Percy John Gumbrell, Registration district: Thakeham, Inferred county: Sussex, Volume: 2b, Page: 207
- ⁹ “1901 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 February 2019), entry for William Gumbrell [sic], Registration district: Thakeham, Sub-registration district: Pulborough, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 9, Piece: 955, Folio: 79, Page: 3, Household schedule number: 17
- ¹⁰ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 February 2019), entry for Elsie Jane Gumbrell, Registration district: Thakeham, Inferred county: Sussex, Volume: 2b, Page: 325
- ¹¹ “1939 Register,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 February 2019), entry for Albert F Gumbrell, Residence Place: Chanctonbury, Sussex, Schedule number: 140; Enumeration district: ENAO, Registration district: 83/1
- ¹² “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 5 February 2019), entry for Gumbrell, Frances May, Registration district: Thakeham, Volume: 02B, Page: 309 and Vol 02B, page 177
- ¹³ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 5 February 2019), entry for Gumbrell, Doris Elizabeth, Registration district: Thakeham, Volume: 02B, Page: 294
- ¹⁴ “1911 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 February 2019), entry for William Gumbrell, Registration district: Thakeham, Registration district number: 83, Sub-registration district: Pulborough, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 9, Household schedule number: 15, Piece: 5308
- ¹⁵ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 5 February 2019), entry for Gumbrell, Lilian Mary, Registration district: Thakeham, Volume: 02B, Page: 558
- ¹⁶ “UK, Army Registers of Soldiers’ Effects, 1901–1929,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 5 February 2019), entry for Ernest Edwin Gumbrell
- ¹⁷ “Gratuity Calculator,” *The war gratuities of WWI* (<https://wargratiuity.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/gratuity-calculator/>: accessed 6 October 2017)
- ¹⁸ “What was the war gratuity?” *The war gratuities of WWI* (<https://wargratiuity.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/what-was-the-war-gratuity/>: accessed 5 February 2019)
- ¹⁹ “UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 28 February 2019) entry for Ernest Edwin Gumbrell
- ²⁰ “Casualty Clearing Station,” *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualty_Clearing_Station: accessed 4 February 2017)
- ²¹ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 6 October 2017), entry for Pernes British Cemetery