

Private George William Simpson[©]
Regimental number: 17870
7th Battalion, Northamptonshire Regiment

born: 12 January 1888–died: 18 May 1916

Private George William Simpson died of head wounds on 18 May 1916 at No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station.¹ No. 1 CCCS was stationed near Bailleul in northern France and six soldiers died at the station that day.² George was buried at Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord (Plot I, Row A, Grave 7).³ Bailleul is in France, but near the Belgian border, about 15 kilometres southwest of Ypres. It was occupied in October 1914 and became an important hospital centre, not just for No. 1 CCCS but also for No. 1 Australian and five British Army casualty clearing stations.⁴

When he arrived at No. 1 CCCS, George did not have any papers and he may have been unconscious, because the chaplain was not aware of his next of kin. So, he wrote to the officer in charge of his unit to notify the unit of George's death. The chaplain did discover, at some point, that his wife was his next of kin and lived at 32 Manor Road in Kingsthorpe, Northamptonshire.⁵

In fact, his wife was probably Ellen Gordon, whom he married in 1910 in Northampton.⁶ He was also probably the son of Thomas Simpson and his wife, the former Mary Ann Fitzhugh. Both his parents were born in about 1864 in Northamptonshire.⁷ They married at the parish church in the Parish of the Holy Sepulchre in Northampton on 4 February 1883⁸ and had 12 children:

- Elizabeth Anne (born in 1883, but died the same year),⁹
- John Thomas (known as Thomas) (born on 6 March 1884),¹⁰
- Fred (born in 1886, but died at the age of 5),¹¹
- George William (born on 12 January 1888),¹²
- Mary Jane (born on 24 November 1889),¹³
- Rose (born on 28 December 1891),¹⁴
- Gladys (born on 14 January 1894),¹⁵
- Frederick (born on 20 January 1896),¹⁶
- Edith (born in 1898),¹⁷
- twins Ethel and Francis Harry,¹⁸ both of whom died in childhood—Ethel at a few months of age¹⁹ and Francis at just over a year;²⁰ and
- Hannah Elizabeth (born in 1903).²¹

At the time of the 1891 Census, the family appears to have been split up. George was living with his uncle—his father's younger brother Harry (born about 1867),²² a shoe finisher, and his wife Fanny at 26 Market Street in Northampton.²³ George's older brother Thomas was living with his maternal grandparents on Harborough Road in Kingsthorpe, Northampton.²⁴ It is not known where his parents or other siblings were living in the spring of 1891.

Between 1894 and 1902, George and several of his siblings were admitted to St Matthew's School in Northampton.²⁵ George began attending St Matthew's School in 1894 and, in 1897, left to go to Kettering Road Boys' School, also in Northampton. However, he did not remain there long as, in 1898, he was readmitted to St Matthew's. He left again after 25 May 1901, at the age of 13.²⁶

By 1898, the family had moved to 34 Moore Street in Kingsthorpe.²⁷ In 1901, George was living there with his parents and all but one of his remaining five siblings—Mary Jane, Gladys, Frederick

and Edith.²⁸ His sister Rose was living with her great-uncle—the brother of his grandmother, Ann Fitzhugh (nee Clements).²⁹

Ten years later, George had married and he and his wife were living at 103 Harborough Road, Kingsthorpe, where George, like his father, was a shoe hand finisher. They had one child, Florence Agnes, born in 1910³⁰ and baptized in Kingsthorpe on 5 February 1911.³¹ They went on to have two more children before George's death: Winifred May, born in 1913,³² and George Thomas, born in 1915.³³

George's wife Ellen was born in about 1891, the daughter of Harry Gordon and his wife, the former Hannah Keber, and was baptized on 20 September 1891 in Kingsthorpe.³⁴ Ellen was the first of Harry and Hannah's 14 children—12 of whom survived to 1911. In 1911, the couple was living at 49 Manor Road in Kingsthorpe, with 11 of their children, the youngest of whom was 4 months old. George's family and that of his wife must have been close, as George's mother Mary Ann was living with the Gordons as a monthly nurse, providing care for the mother after the birth of her last child.³⁵ In the meantime, George's father Thomas was living at 9 Fort Street in Northampton with four of their children.³⁶

George enlisted in the 7th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment in Northampton³⁷ in about April 1915.³⁸ He joined the Western Front in France on 17 September 1915.³⁹ In mid-May 1916, the battalion was stationed near Wulverghem in Belgium. It is not known when or how George was injured because, on 18 May, there was not much aerial activity or shelling during the day and the battalion was relieved by the 2nd Battalion of the Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians). However, in the previous days, there had been gas alerts, aerial activity and sniper, artillery and heavy machine gun fire.⁴⁰ George may have been wounded in some of these activities.

George survived only eight months on the Front and was awarded posthumously 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).⁴¹

Shortly after the end of the war, Ellen remarried. She married Arthur Adams (born on 10 Jun 1883) in 1920⁴² and they had at least three children together—Cyril J. (born in 1921),⁴³ Gwendoline (born on 17 August 1928)⁴⁴ and Leonard (born in 1930).⁴⁵ In 1939, Ellen and Arthur were living at 59 Newington Road in Northampton, where Arthur was in the boot and shoe industry.⁴⁶

George's son followed him in the shoe trade. In 1939, he was a boot and shoe operative fitting cutter and he and his wife (the former Winifred E. Waterfield)⁴⁷ were living at 37 Kingsway in Northampton.⁴⁸

George's brother-in-law, Reginald Gordon, also lost his life in the Great War. He had enlisted about nine months after George⁴⁹ but survived until 10 May 1918.⁵⁰ He had been a 13-year-old boy when George's mother Mary Anne was helping in his family's home in 1911. Possibly another sadness for Mary Anne.

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