

**Private Harry Ernest Homer D.C.M.©**  
**Regimental number: 3014**  
**8th Battalion, The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment)**

**born: 1894 - died: 30 April 1916**

Private Harry Ernest Homer was born in early 1894 in Islington, London<sup>1</sup> and was baptised at St Peter's, Clerkenwell, on 29 April of the same year.<sup>2</sup> His brother, Sidney James Burnett, born the previous year,<sup>3</sup> was baptised the same day. They were the sons of James George Homer and his wife, Catherine (formerly Burnett). James and Catherine were both born in about 1864. James was son of Henry Homer and Catherine, the daughter of Samuel Burnett.<sup>4</sup> James and Catherine married on 2 May 1892 at the parish church of St Leonard's Shoreditch in London.<sup>5</sup> They had three children: the two sons, Sidney and Harry, and a daughter, Lilian Grace (born in 1897).<sup>6</sup>

In 1901, the family was living at 77 Torren's Buildings, City Road, in Islington.<sup>7</sup> By 1911, they had moved a few blocks away to Peabody's Building on Dufferin Street, but Harry was not with the family.<sup>8</sup> Harry was just 17, but was probably a miner working underground and lodging in the home of John and Ida Jane at 2 Syndicate Terrace in Mynyddislwyn, Monmouthshire, Wales.<sup>9</sup>

Harry enlisted in London as a Private in the 8th Battalion of the Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment<sup>10</sup> and then joined the British Expeditionary Force in France on 31 August 1915.<sup>11</sup> He died just eight months later.

In April 1916 the 8th Battalion was stationed near Dranoutre, Belgium.<sup>12</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>13</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>14</sup>

Harry was likely injured in this gas attack because he died of wounds and gas poisoning at the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 30 April.<sup>15</sup> When he died, there were no papers to identify his next-of-kin. He lost four comrades from his battalion in the few days at the end of April and beginning of May: Private Elvin Harry Davis, Private Richard Westfield, Private James Taylor and Corporal William Osborn Bush. Most of his comrades had been poisoned by chlorine gas. The effects



**Private Harry Ernest Homer**  
Source: Family

of the gas attacks were also felt at the 1<sup>st</sup> CCCS, stationed near Bailleul,<sup>16</sup> which was just about five miles from Dranoutre.



**Gravestone of Private Harry**

**Ernest Homer**

Source: Family

Harry was a member of the Church of England<sup>17</sup> and was buried in the Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord (Plot II, Row D, Grave 130).<sup>18</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 the 1<sup>st</sup> 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>19</sup>

Harry was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, which was given to Other Ranks (non-officers). He received the medal

For conspicuous gallantry in volunteering to go out and bring in the wounded man, and successfully carrying out his object. He was under rifle fire for about two hours.

He was also 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).<sup>20</sup> The monies owing to him from the army were sent to his mother.<sup>21</sup>

Before he married, Harry's father had served in the army. He enlisted in 1883, at the age of 18, in the Lincolnshire Regiment (Regimental number 4895).<sup>22</sup> He had previously served in the Royal Fusiliers. He initially spent just over a year in England and then served in the East Indies from 1884 to 1891. On his return, he served in England until he left the army in August 1895. After which he had a number of different occupations. In 1892, he was a brewer,<sup>23</sup> in 1901, a general labourer<sup>24</sup> and then, in 1911, a hat blocker.<sup>25</sup> However, when the Great War was declared, James re-enlisted. He enlisted in November 1914, at the age of 47, as a Private in the London Regiment at Finsbury (Regimental number 200024). He was appointed a Lance Corporal a few months later and then a Corporal in October 1915. The following month he went back to India, where he served until December 1919. During his time there, he was promoted twice – to Lance Sergeant in January 1918 and to Sergeant in March 1918. He was discharged on demobilisation at the end of March 1920. At that time, his wife was living at 87 Compton Buildings, Goswell Road in London. He was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918).<sup>26</sup>



**Jill Baker, with floral tribute**

Source: Family

Harry's brother, Sidney, also served in the Great War. He was a Private in the 7th Battalion of the London Regiment (Regimental number 350383) and was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).<sup>27</sup>

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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 27 August 2015), entry for Harry Ernest Homer, Registration district: Islington, Inferred County: London, Volume: 1b, Page: 349

<sup>2</sup> "London, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813-1906," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 27 August 2015), entry for Harry Ernest Homer

<sup>3</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 27 August 2015), entry for Sidney James B. Homer, Registration district: Holborn, Inferred County: London, Volume: 1b, Page: 766

<sup>4</sup> "London, England, Marriages and Banns, 1754-1921," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 27 August 2015), entry for James George Homer, Parish: St Leonard, Shoreditch, Borough: Hackney, Register Type: Parish Register

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 27 August 2015), entry for Lilian Grace Homer, Registration district: Islington, Inferred County: London, Volume: 1b, Page: 354;

<sup>7</sup> "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 27 August 2015), entry for Harry Homer, Registration district: Islington, Sub-registration district: Islington, South-East, ED, institution, or vessel: 22, Piece: 188, Folio: 159, Page Number: 16, Household schedule number: 117

<sup>8</sup> "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 27 August 2015), entry for James George Homer, Registration district: Holborn, Registration District Number: 14, Sub-registration district: St Luke, ED, institution, or vessel: 4, Piece: 1252

<sup>9</sup> "1911 Wales Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 5 January 2015), entry for Harry Ernest Homer, Registration district: Newport, Registration District Number: 587, Sub-registration district: Mynyddislwyn, ED, institution, or vessel: 07, Household schedule number: 332, Piece: 32034

<sup>10</sup> "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 26 August 2015), entry for Harry Homer

<sup>11</sup> "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 26 August 2015), entry for Harry Homer

<sup>12</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>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," *Library and Archives Canada*, (records accessed 2013 & 2015), Record Group 9, series IIC10, volume 4556, Record number 69

<sup>16</sup> "War Diaries of the First World War: 1<sup>st</sup> 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)

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- <sup>17</sup> "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Record number 69
- <sup>18</sup> "Commonwealth War Graves Commission," ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org); accessed 17 August 2015), entry for Homer, H., Service No: 3014
- <sup>19</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>20</sup> "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 26 August 2015), entry for Harry Homer
- <sup>21</sup> "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 26 August 2015), entry for Harry Homer
- <sup>22</sup> "British Army WWI Pension Records 1914-1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 27 August 2015), entry for James George Homer, Regimental Number: 4, Form Title: Short Service Attestation. Unless otherwise stated, all information about James' military career come from his pension record. There is some confusion about whether he served in the London Regiment or the Rifle Brigade, or both during the Great War.
- <sup>23</sup> "London, England, Marriages and Banns, 1754-1921," entry for James George Homer
- <sup>24</sup> "1901 England Census," entry for Harry Homer
- <sup>25</sup> "1911 England Census," entry for James George Homer
- <sup>26</sup> "UK, WWI Service Medal and Award Rolls, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 27 August 2015), entry for James George Homer
- <sup>27</sup> "UK, WWI Service Medal and Award Rolls, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 27 August 2015), entry for Sydney James Homer