

My Great Uncle's War 1914-1917

My grandfather George Maltby fought in the Great War and the Second World War, being rescued from the beaches at Dunkirk, and had a happy family life until his death in 1972. He was born in Cambridge on 14th January 1899 and was one of eleven children. There were four boys who enlisted into the army and all but one returned safely in 1919.

Having read much about the Great War my father and I decided in 1987 to visit the battlefields of Ypres and the Somme on a specialist tour. Prior to departure my mother discovered an 'In Memoriam' Card for my grandfather's brother, my great uncle Frank Herbert Maltby. This card showed that he was buried in a cemetery in France south east of Arras, the centre of the battle of 1917 and that he had been in the Cambridgeshire regiment before being transferred to the 5th Battalion Yorkshire regiment. On the tour, my father and I travelled to the small Heninel Communal Cemetery Extension containing the graves of soldiers killed in the fighting between April and July 1917. There are 140 gravestones, all in military rows, laid out in the style of an English churchyard as Lutyens had planned.

Seeing the rows of gravestones was very thought provoking. So many people whose relatives had fought, and in many instances died, in the Great War would like to find out about their lives and war experiences. I now wanted to know more about Frank Maltby who went to war caught up in patriotic fervour and died on 19 July 1917 a few weeks

after his 21st birthday in 2007 I had the time to commit myself to some real research into Frank Maltby's war. In September 2007 I went on another trip to the Arras area and the Heninel Communal Cemetery Extension to visit the grave of private 242470 Frank Herbert Maltby of the 5th Battalion Yorkshire regiment.



The author and his father at the grave of Frank Maltby in Heninel Communal Cemetery Extension October 1987



Heninel Communal Cemetery Extension September 2007

I followed this in 2008 with basic research armed with advice gained from the PRO guide *Army Service Records of the First World War* by William Spencer.

An internet search of the WO363/364 Army service records drew a blank and even a visit to the National Archives in Kew searching through the microfilm copies of service records resulted in nothing. Not surprising given that 75% of them were destroyed in 1940 by a German bomb. However, I did find Frank's Medal Index card WO/372 showing that he was entitled to receive the Victory and British war medals. This medal index card shows that he had two regimental numbers. The first number - 5211 - was very obviously early in the war and appeared to refer to his time in the Cambridgeshires. The second number 242470 seemed to refer to his transfer to the Yorkshire Regiment. The regimental numbering system is clearly explained in Simon Fowler's "Tracing Your First World War". The other useful evidence found in the archives was the Medal Roll WO/329/952/ page 322 for the 5th Battalion Yorkshire Regiment, but again it made no reference to the Cambridgeshire Regiment.

By the end of 2008 I had made some progress since first viewing the data on Frank's headstone. I had found out that Frank Maltby was in the 5th Battalion Yorkshire regiment so I now had to find information about the Yorkshire Regiment. The Yorkshire Regiment World War 1 Remembrance website produced by Edward Nicholl proved useful, confirming Frank's details from the records but again no mention of whether he was in another regiment before the Yorkshires. However, Edward was able to tell me that of the Yorkshires who were buried in the same cemetery as Frank three had come from the Cambridge Area.

The next step was to find information about the Cambridgeshire Regiment. I found the Regimental website and corresponded with Cliff Brown, the chairman of the Cambridgeshire branch of the WFA. His records told me that Frank probably enlisted in late 1915 and went into the Cambridgeshire home service battalion. A large group of Cambridge men were sent to France on 30th August 1916 and posted to the 4th and 5th Battalions of the Yorkshire Regiment. I also researched newspaper articles published in Cambridge in August 1917 and available in the Cambridge library. These reported Frank's death on 19th July 1917. He had been killed along with others in the same trench, by a shell. From these newspapers I had a photograph of my great uncle and knew more family details. Figure 3. He was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Maltby of Norfolk Street, Cambridge. He had joined up as early as November 1914 into the 2/1 battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment transferring to the Yorkshire Regiment when he was sent to France in August 1916.

The article from the CAMBRIDGE CHRONICLE 1st August 1917 finishes with a tribute from his company officer:

'He was killed whilst doing his duty during a critical period and he died the death of a true British soldier with his face to the enemy. Arrangements have been made for the body to be interred in an English cemetery and a cross will be erected over his grave.'



Frank Maltby - Cambridge Independent Press
17 August 1917

That cemetery is HENINEL COMMUNAL CEMETERY EXTENSION which was begun in APRIL 1917 and now contains the

graves of FRANK MALTBY and 27 other members of the Yorkshire regiment.

So why did Frank, who had joined up as early as November 1914, not see active service until August 1916? What did he do for twenty-two months? In November 1914, Frank joined the 2/1 Battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment which was a training unit formed in September 1914. Frank spent most of his army service in various training camps up and down the UK and finally the 2/1 Bn ended up in Harrogate in June 1916. Two months later Frank and 160 others from the 2/1 Bn. were posted to France and found themselves drafted into the Yorkshire regiment. This was when the Pals' battalions had been devastated by the slaughter of the Somme. The 5th Battalion Yorkshires were recruited mainly from the Scarborough area and needed fresh troops provided by the Cambridgeshires in August 1916. I also found the answer to riddle of the two regimental service numbers on his Medal record card. The first number 5211 was the one given to him when he first joined the Yorkshire regiment in August 1916. Then in April 1917 the army changed to a six figure system for the Territorials hence 242470 became his service number. I know when Frank joined up and when he went to France. I know that he spent almost two years in the 2/1 Cambridgeshire Regiment being trained but never going overseas with them. In August 1916 he and many men from Cambridge were shipped to France to fill the gaps in the 4th and 5th Battalions of the Yorkshires - the Green Howards - in

preparation for another offensive on the Somme. Frank's active service on the Western Front lasted from 30th August 1916 to 19th July 1917 during which time he took part in the September Somme offensive with the first tank attacks before transferring to the Arras area to take part in the most bloody battle of the whole war measured in terms of daily casualty rates. As the article of 8 August 1917 in the Cambridge Chronicle says;

'He went to the front in August (1916) and had seen some of the most desperate fighting in the recent big battles. About a week before his death he spent his 21st birthday in the trenches'

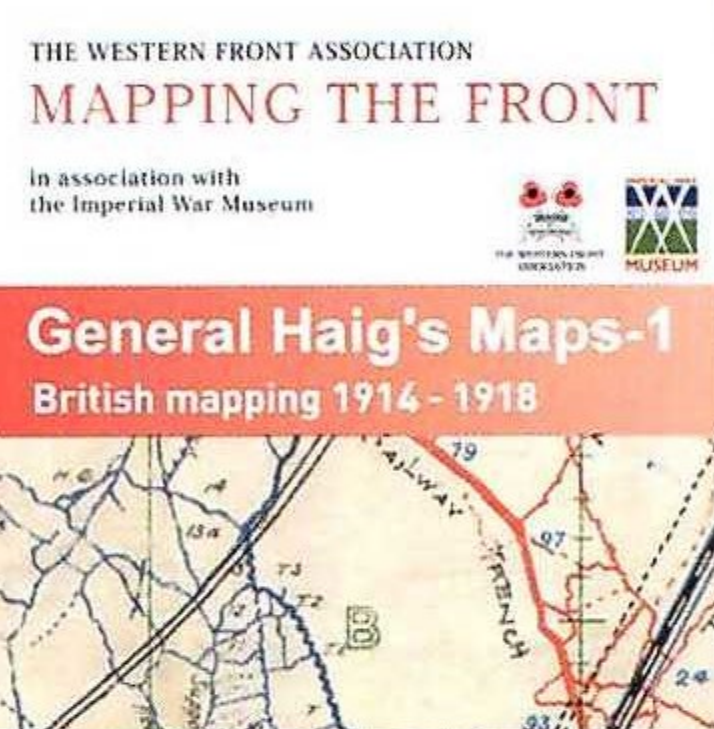
My researches have revealed an insight into the short life of my great uncle Frank Maltby.

Chris Weekes

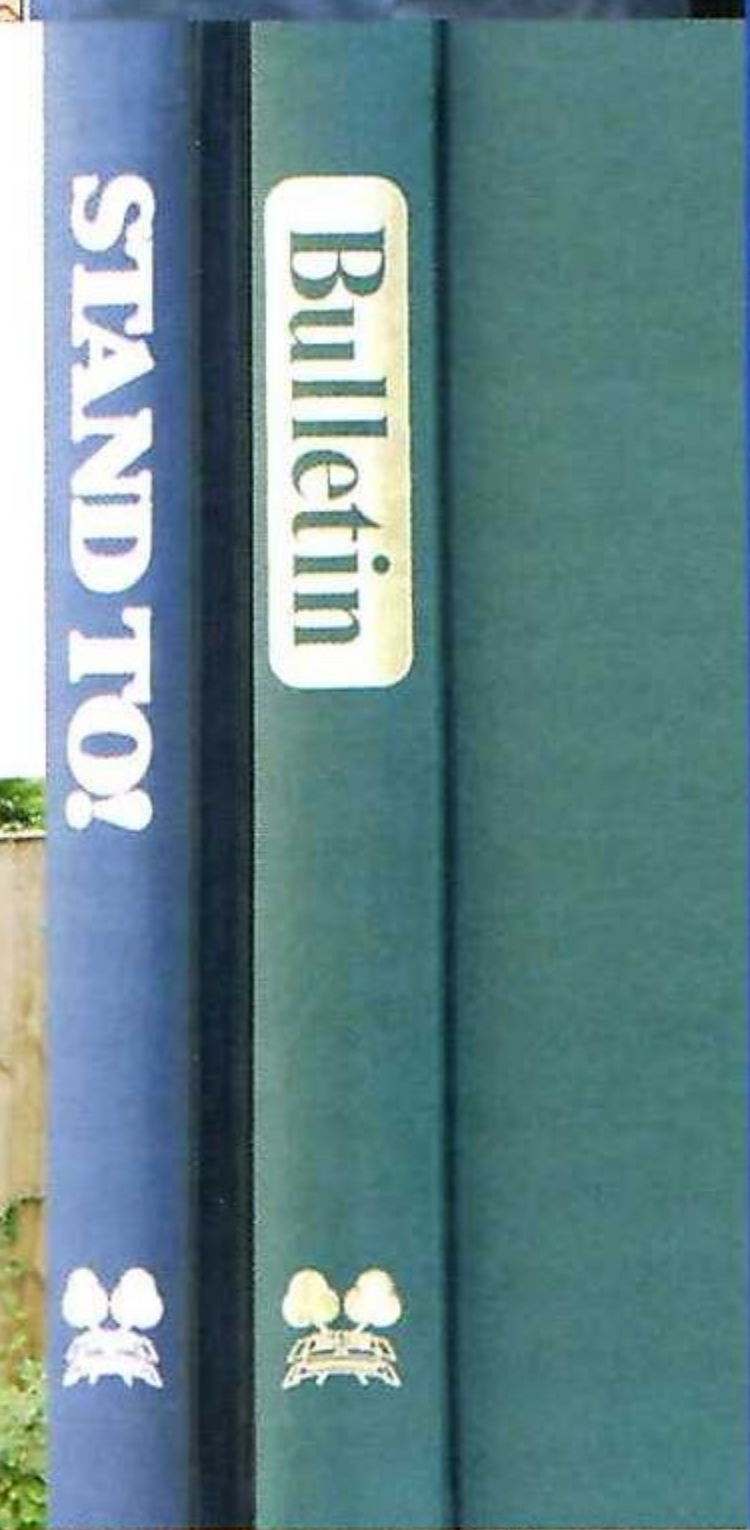
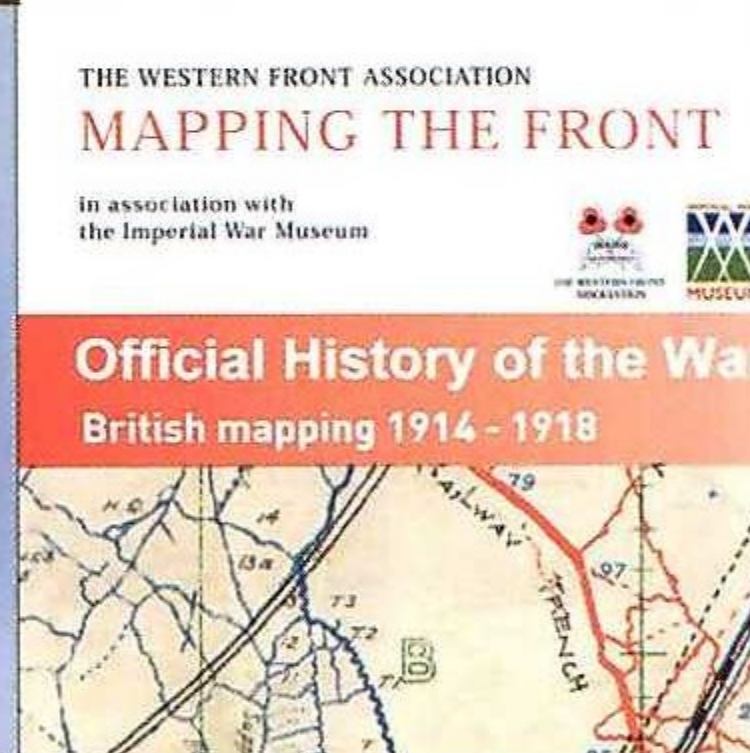
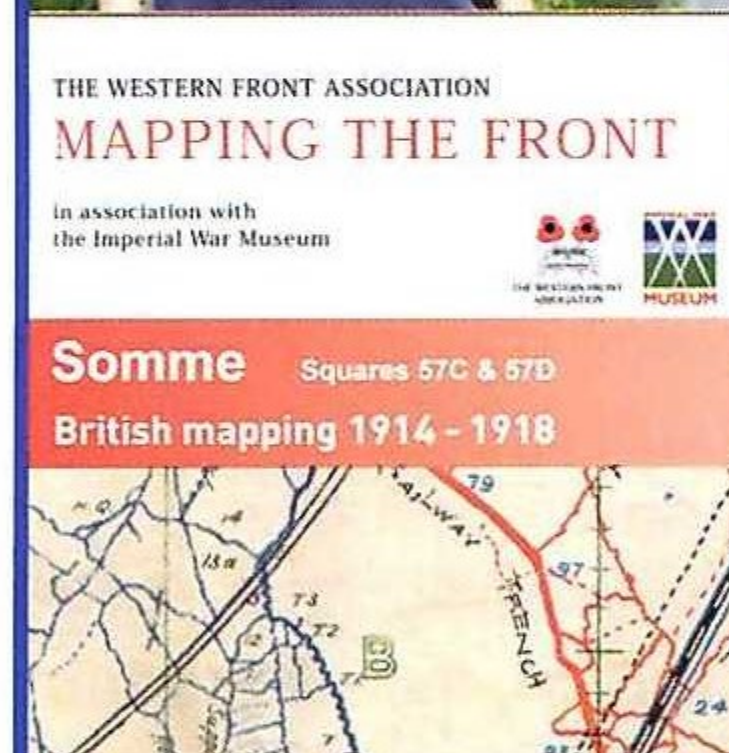
Acknowledgements

Cambridgeshire Libraries, Cliff Brown - Chairman of Cambridgeshire Branch of the Western Front Association, CWGC website, Edward Nicholl, Yorkshire Regiment First World War Remembrance website, Green Howards Museum - Richmond, Yorks, National Archives - Kew, London, Roll of Honour website, Simon Fowler *Tracing Your First World War Ancestors* (Countryside Books 2003), Soldiers Died in the Great War website, Spencer William *Army Service Records of the First World War* (Public Record Office Reader's Guide No 19, 2001), The Long, Long, Trail - The British Army 1914/1918 website.

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