

Ralph Hawtrey

Born 19/7/1879, registered as 'Ralphe Hawtrey' at Richmond, Surrey, son of Montague Hawtrey and Constance Maud Hawtrey, née Parr (believed married 1875). His sister Constance Louisa Mary Hawtrey was born in 1876 in Shanghai. His father died 7/10/1879 (cause or place not known). At the 1881 census he was living with a great uncle at Clewer, New Windsor. In 1887 his mother married the Rev. William Campbell Penney (Principal of Elizabeth College) at Bedminster. In 1889 he entered Elizabeth College and appeared on the 1891 census of the Channel Islands living at Elizabeth College. In the 1901 census of Wales he appears age 21 described as a Colliery Surveyor, boarding at Eglwysilan St Helen, Glamorgan.

In 1914 he was mining in Siberia and returned to the UK to enlist. He joined the Artists Rifles (28th Battalion London Regiment as a Private soldier (3209) on 20/1/15, age 35 yrs 6 months; height 5' 5½", giving his address as Elizabeth College, Guernsey and Royal Societies Club, St James St. His next of kin was given as his stepfather Rev. William Campbell Penney, Elizabeth College. On 22/4/15 he was commissioned Second Lieutenant in the 8th (Reserve) Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment.

On 7/8/15 he married Doreen Erroll Stopford (born 23/7/1890) at Fulham. On 20/9/15 he arrived at 179th Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers, based at Albert, France then engaged in mining in the La Boisselle sector. On 7/3/16 he was admitted to hospital. On 15/3/16 he was promoted temporary Lieutenant. He was killed in action on 3/9/16 by shell fire at High Wood after exploding a bored charged communication trench placed with a Sentinel Jack hydraulic borer. He was buried at Albert Cemetery.

His widow's address at the time of his death was Wykeham House, Romsey but she wrote to the War Office on 28/2/17 from Damans Cottage, Salisbury Lane, N. Romsey, Hants. His next of kin memorial plaque and scroll were sent on 28/2/1919 to Mrs Robins, 70 Great George Street, Hill Head, Glasgow.

Correspondence in the service record file in the National Archives indicates that in 1930, his son Norman Hawtrey is to be taken to Australia by his guardian Major Richard Nunn Aylward, DSO MC, (late RE Signals) who was at present in India.

Correspondence is from Walter F Potheary (late Major LRB, brother in law to Aylward) 102 Manor Rd, Wallington, Surrey.

His sister Constance Louisa Mary Hawtreay was author of *The availing struggle. A record of the planting and development of the Church of England in Western Australia, 1829-1947*. (Perth: Patersons Press, 1949).

Interview by Alexander Barrie with Hugh Ripley Kerr (late of 179th Tunnelling Company), 1959 (Royal Engineers Museum):

... a dear little man who had been out in Russia a lot mining, was in the Northampton Regiment. Crawled out of one of the saps one day covered in chalk and looking like death, and the sentry said, "who are you?" He said, "I'm an RE officer" Sentry: "You don't look like it. Here, come on," and he arrested him and took him down to Company HQ. He was killed afterwards. Full of guts.

Extract from 'Exploits in the First World War' by Capt. Stanley Crossland Bullock, MC (late of 179th Tunnelling Company) (From a photocopy of a typescript copy held by the Royal Engineers Museum):

The other two sections who had been working further south in front of Contalmaison and High Wood had not come off as well as we had. K [Kerr], F [Fox?], Buswell, H [Hawtreay] and Thompson, and Morgan who had recently come to us, had all been engaged in pipe pushing, which was carried on under great difficulties. This work was done by using a hydraulic ram which forced a series of pipes through the ground, and was used as a means of connecting our front trenches with the Germans. A pit was first cut and the pipes were driven in 7 or 8 feet below the surface within as small a distance of the enemies' trenches as was safe without detection. These pipes were filled with explosive and as soon as an attack took place, they were exploded and formed a rough trench which could be afterwards squared up and made suitable for the communication trench. Actually they were not very successful, since the trench was necessarily in one straight line, and traverses are essential to prevent the trench from being wrecked by shell fire.

After C [Carr?] and I reached H.Q. we were expecting to hear from F [sic i.e. Thompson] and H [Hawtreay] how things had gone on their front, and when evening came and they had not arrived we began to be a bit anxious. Two of

their section officers and some men were sent up by the O.C. to make enquiries, but they could find out nothing that night. Next morning we sent up again and after some search both their bodies were found. As far as we could learn, as soon as they had exploded their charge they had got up onto the trench parapet to see how the attack was going, and they must have received a direct hit from a shell. We buried them in Albert British Cemetery.

(Sources: service record in National Archives; census returns; War Diary 179th Tunnelling Company RE (National Archives); *The Elizabethan*; http://genealogia.netopia.pt/pessoas/pes_show.php?id=88280; Chronology of Mining at La Boisselle (Simon Jones) at <http://freespace.virgin.net/simon.jones87/La%20BoisselleContents.htm>)

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