Second Lieutenant Cyril Vernon Hadley

Between 1.30 and 2 am on 3rd July during the 1st Battle of the Somme, Second Lieutenant Cyril Hadley disappeared.. He was last seen leading his platoon in an attack on the German lines at Fricourt, near Albert. His father desperately sought to discover what had happened to his son in the hope that he was still alive and taken as a prisoner of war by the Germans. Enquiries were made but it was not good news.

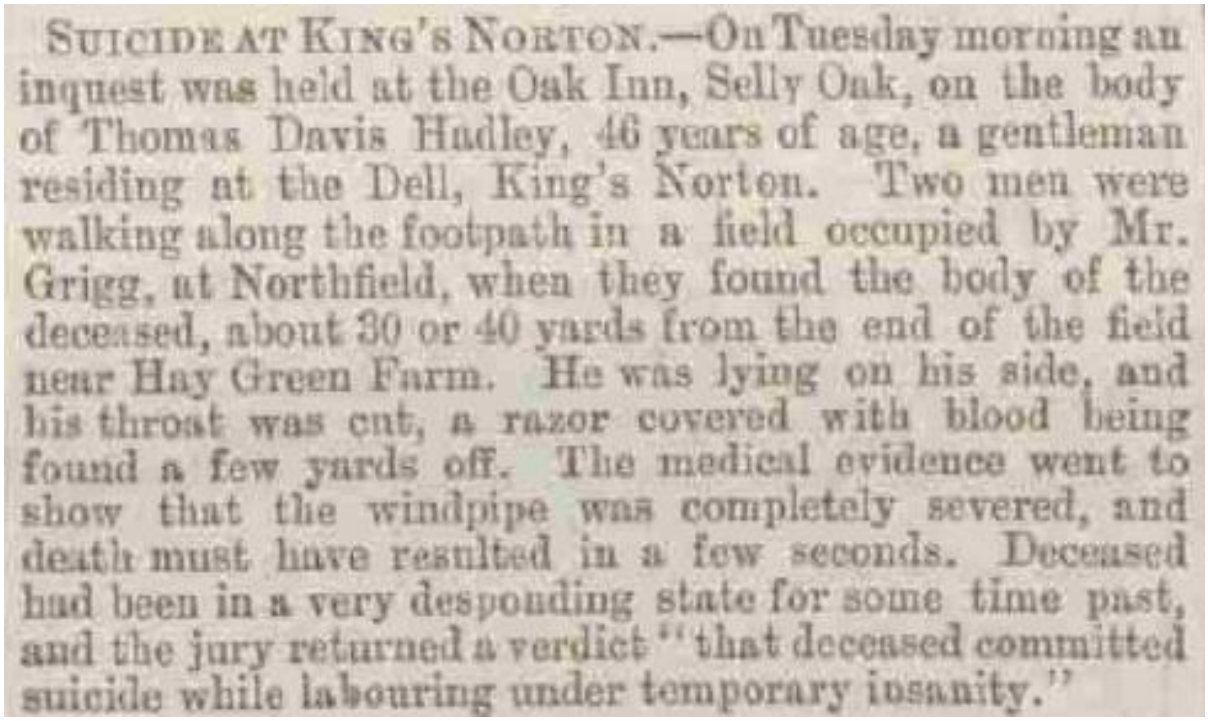
The 1851 census records Cyril's grandfather, Thomas Davis Hadley, as an articled clerk to a builder and architect, aged 17 years with his mother Elizabeth (b c1893), a widow, living with her married daughter Martha Wood in Heath Road, Stourbridge Union, Worcestershire. In early 1857 Thomas married Sarah Worral[i] and by 1861, had set himself up as a 'cut nail' manufacturer employing '5 men, 12 boys and 10 girls' at the Mitre Nail Works in Bishop Street in close proximity to the Mitre Inn, before it transferred to larger premises in Eyre Street in 1864.[ii] The family lived in Barker Street Aston. They had two children Elizabeth (b 1858) and Frederic (b 1859).

Figure 1: A portion of the Eyre Street Factory when in the ownership of Felix Hadley & Co., *c.* 1900. *(Kynoch Journal) with the kind permission of The History Press.*

Thomas appears to have survived the 'miserably low and partly ruinous prices' that beset the industry up to then, which led to the setting up of the United

Cut Nail Trade Association in 1868 to regulate prices.[iii] The Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 gave the industry a brief upturn in trade, which enabled Thomas to continue in business during 1871 and employ '22 pairs of hands'. The family moved to 5 Trafalgar Road, Moseley, where Sarah looked after the family of six children with the help of her husband's niece, Fanny Wood, together with a monthly nurse and a general servant.

Between 1874 and 1879, the '*reduced price of iron, unusual competition and a continually falling market*', caused '*less than gentlemanly behaviour in the form of lamentable underselling and the violation of the list price*'.[iv] We will never know for sure if the depression in trade caused Thomas' despondent state of mind but on Tuesday 16th March 1880 he took his own life[v]



SUICIDE AT KING'S NORTON.—On Tuesday morning an inquest was held at the Oak Inn, Selly Oak, on the body of Thomas Davis Hadley, 46 years of age, a gentleman residing at the Dell, King's Norton. Two men were walking along the footpath in a field occupied by Mr. Grigg, at Northfield, when they found the body of the deceased, about 30 or 40 yards from the end of the field near Hay Green Farm. He was lying on his side, and his throat was cut, a razor covered with blood being found a few yards off. The medical evidence went to show that the windpipe was completely severed, and death must have resulted in a few seconds. Deceased had been in a very despondng state for some time past, and the jury returned a verdict "that deceased committed suicide while labouring under temporary insanity."

Figure 2: Newspaper report of the death of Thomas

By the time the 1881 census was taken, Sarah, was a widow, aged forty-five, and had moved to 'Silver Birches', Cambridge Road, Moseley, with her eight children, the youngest being only three years old. Fanny was still living with the family with the addition of a new general servant Mary Morris. Frederic, aged twenty one, was employed as 'brass bedstead manufacturer's manager' and living at the family home.

In early 1887 Frederic married Ellen Louisa Cooke.[vi] Whether they were able to move into their own home after the marriage is not clear, as in 1891, Ellen was recorded as living with her two daughters at the home of her widowed father, Nathaniel a retired warehouseman in Blenheim Road, Moseley and her husband elsewhere. By 1901, Frederic, then a machinist and toolmaker (copying presser) and Ellen acquired their own home at 72 Cambridge Road and were raising their six children, including Cyril, born 1896,[vii] with the domestic assistance of a nurse and a cook. They were affluent enough to send the four eldest sons to King Edward's School, New Street, Birmingham. Cyril started his education there in 1907,[viii] leaving five years later in 1912, to become a 'trade clerk'.[ix]

When war was declared, Cyril enlisted in 1/2nd Wessex Field Corps as Sapper, 1050, C V Hadley on 28th September 1914. At the time of his attestation Cyril was a junior master[x] at Kings Holme School, Weston-Super-Mare.[xi] He spent the next three months undergoing basic military training before embarking for France, on 21st December,[xii] where he joined his regiment and served as part of the British Expeditionary Force in Armentieres, Ypres and Poperinghe,[xiii] during which time he had been promoted to acting 2nd Corporal on 29th May 1915.[xiv]

On 19th August 1915, Cyril was back in England for o month's training at the Cadet Training School having received a commission. His training complete, Cyril was gazetted on 19th September 1915 as a Second Lieutenant with 'B' Corps, 10th Battalion Worcestershire Regiment (10th Worcesters), joining his regiment in France ready for the 'Big Push' in 1916.[xv]

On 1st July, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the 10th Worcesters, having spent the night before in trenches west of Albert, moved forward at around 9 am to assembly positions near the front line. In the communication trenches, however, confusion reigned as wounded men were brought out and men assembling vied with the stretcher parties trying to get in. It was also raining and the trench was knee deep in mud. The operation was cancelled.

By dawn the Battalion had made its way back to the reserve trenches utterly exhausted. The remainder of the day was spent in sleep.

Just after mid-night on 3rd July, the 10th Worcesters moved across open ground to reach the front line, so as not to risk another jam in the communication trenches, but as a result sustained many casualties. Shortly after 3 am amid

blazing gun-fire all around, the men were ordered to advance, cross No Man's Land and charge the German defences. Fierce fighting followed. In small platoons the Worcesters made their way towards the ruins of La Boisselle, a village that formed a salient in the enemy lines. Only by momentary light from flares and shell-bursts was it possible for them to distinguish friend from foe. The first light of dawn enabled the fighters in the village to recognise each other with certainty, and the struggle reached its climax. The village was captured but Cyril was not to be found.[xvi]

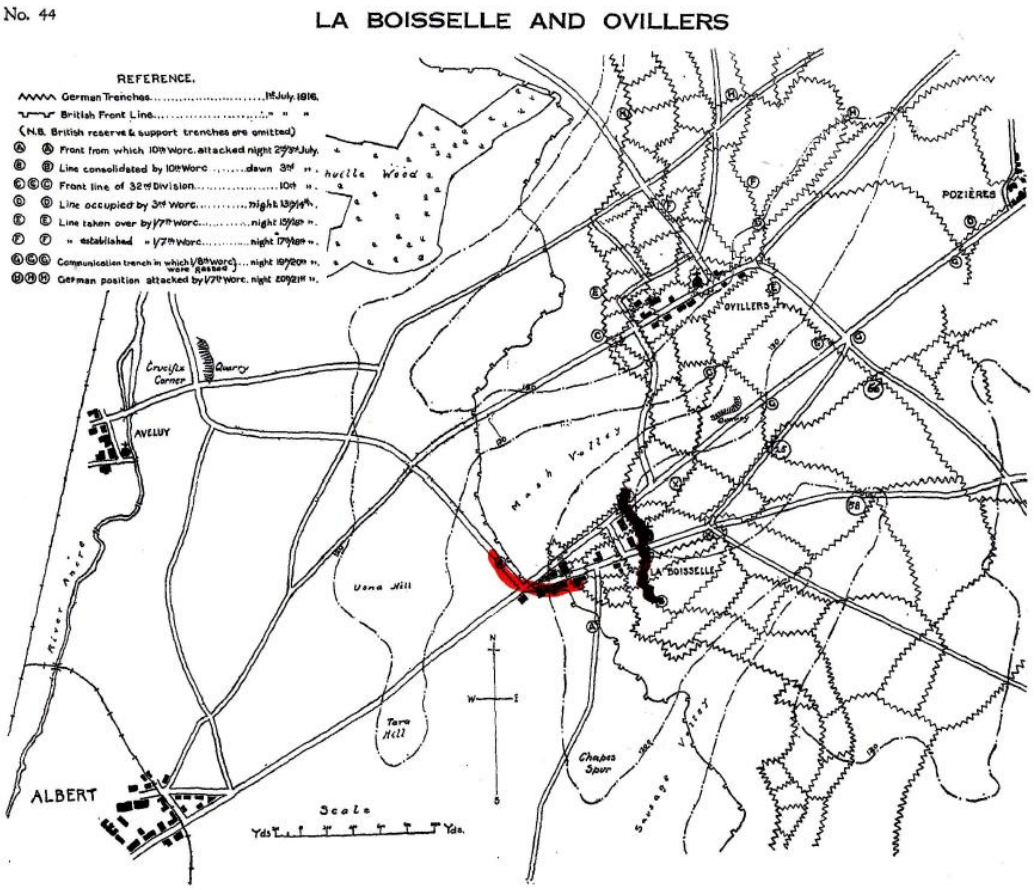


Figure 3; Map showing La Boisselle in relation to Abert and the position of the 10th Worcesters on 2nd/3rd July 1916 at 3am (red) and their positions at the end of the day (black)

On 9th July 1916, his father, Frederic, received a telegram reporting Cyril missing. In a desperate attempt to find out what happened to his son, he sent a letter on 21st September saying:

Sir

I have failed to get any information as to my son, and I should be glad, if it is possible, to get some tidings through the American Embassy (German Division).

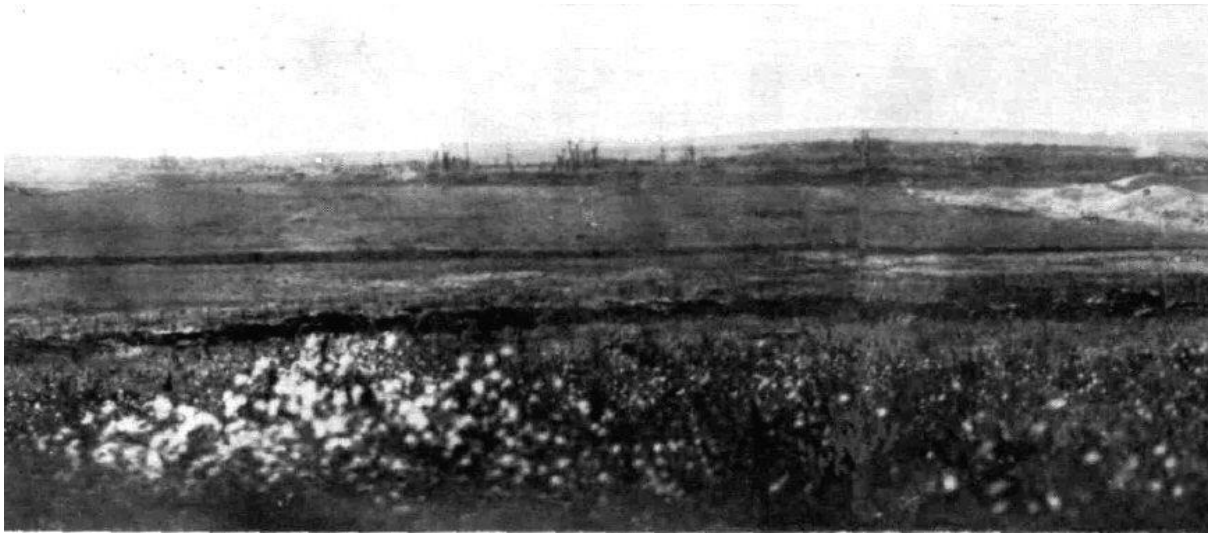


Figure 4: **La Boisselle, view taken from the 10th Battalion Worcestershire Regiment trenches during the battle on the 3rd July 1916**

On 26th September he received a reply stating:

The Military Secretary presents his compliments to Mr Hadley, and begs to inform him that no further report has been received concerning Second Lieutenant C V Hadley, 10th Worcestershire Regiment. His name was included in a list of missing officers sent to the United States Embassy for circulation in all Hospitals and Internment Camps in Germany. In the event, however, of Second Lieutenant becoming a prisoner of war, Mr Hadley will probably receive the salient intimation to the effect from Second Lieutenant Hadley himself. In this event, the Military Secretary hopes that Mr Hadley will be good enough to inform this department.

In the mean time, enquiries were made and survivors from the action were interviewed as to the fate of Cyril.

The first interview was with a member of Cyril's Platoon and took place on 15th July 1916 at the First General Hospital in Edgbaston, Birmingham. Private Thomas Meakin, No 18240, of 2 Warwick Place, Villa Street, Hockley, Birmingham states when questioned about the fate of Cyril by J Passey that:

On 3rd July 1916 at Albert we made an advance at break of day. Lieutenant Hadley was leading his platoon. He was struck by a bomb and fell at the German barbed wire.

Another interviewee was Maurice Workman at Fulham Military Hospital, from 'A' Company, 10th Worcestershire Regiment, home address Long Street, Dursley, Gloucestershire. He recalled when interviewed that:

In the advance on 3rd July in the early morning, Lieutenant Hadley reached the German's barbed wire and was bombed, and seen to fall. I was wounded earlier, but I heard the above on the way to the base from the Machine Gunners who saw it.

A third witness was found on 12th September at the City of London Hospital in Dublin. Private C L Overthrow, No 15658, 10th Worcesters from New Street Gloucester was interviewed by W C Green and recounted that:

In the advance on July 3rd, about 1.30 to 2 am at Fricourt in an attack, when about 50 yards from their objective, a German trench, he saw Lieutenant Hadley fall, knocked over in very marshy ground and long grass. Informant pressed on with his company and was hit by shrapnel near the German trench which they took. Informant crawled and rolled back until picked up and did not see Lieutenant Hadley again.

For official purposes Cyril's date of death was agreed to be 3rd July 1916. On 13th September 1921, Frederic applied for his son's medals, the 1915 Star, General War Medal and Victory medal. His address at that time was 'Oakfield', 18 Blenheim Road, Moseley, Birmingham.[xvii]

Cyril is commemorated with over 72,000 others who have no known grave on the Thiepval Memorial. He was just twenty years old.

He is also commemorated at St Mary's Church, Moseley

Figure 4:(left) The Thiepval Memorial

Cyril's four other brothers also served and survived the war

Frederick H Hadley after joining the 15th Royal Warwickshire Regiment, No 490, on 16th September 1914, was reported as 'missing' four months later on 15th January 1915. He was declared to be a deserter. Six months later, on 11th July, army attestation papers record that he fraudulently enlisted in the 1st Labour Battalion, Motor Division of the Army Service Corps (ASC), Private, No 117471, F H Hadley. Frederick went to France on 22nd August 1915. When this was discovered he was sent to trial for the offense, but this was dispensed with on 15th January 1916 but all previous service was forfeited and he was held to serve in the ASC in France from that date until demobilisation in 1919. He received three war medals, including the 1915 Star.[xviii]

Geoffrey Hugh Hadley enlisted in 4th Hussars in August 1914 and on promotion to Second Lieutenant served with 3rd Royal Warwickshire Regiment (RWR), with the 12th Battalion RWR in January 1916 and 16th Battalion RWR from February

to July 1916 at the Somme, Neuve Chappel in September 1916, La Basse in March 1917 and finally Vimy Ridge in April 1917 where he was captured and remained a prisoner of war until November 1918.

Edgar Allen Hadley enlisted as a gunner in the RGA in July 1916. After training in Cornwall he went to Italy in July 1917 attached to 390 Siege Battery; posted to Carso, Egypt, October 1917; Piave, Italy in January 1918, Asiago Plateau, April 1918 and finally Cadet School in Brighton in October 1918 on promotion.

Edward Septimus Hadley, June 1916,a cadet on HM Training Ship Worcester in June 1918; Midshipman with RNR, Sept 1918 on HMS Blanche;; with the Grand Fleet until February 1919; took part in the surrender of the German fleet 21st November 1918.[xix]

Researched and written by Edwina Rees

Moseley Society History Group

Endnotes

i England & Wales marriages 1837-2008, Birmingham, 1857, 1/4, 6D, 203

ii The Flypress Industrial History
http://www.theflypress.com/notes/
e-mail , Guy Sjogren, 20.10.2016

iii Sjogren, Guy, 2013. *Midland History*: The Rise and Decline of the Birmingham Cut-Nail Trade c1811-1914. Volume 38, No 1, p 48

iv See iii, p 54

v *Birmingham Daily Post*, 17th March 1880

vi England & Wales marriages 1837-2008, Kings Norton, 1887, 1/4, 6C, 536

vii England & Wales Births 1837-2006, 1896, Kings Norton, 3/4, 6C, 384

viii Service Record of King Edward's School, Birmingham, 1914-1919

ix National Archives, British Officers after 1913, Ref WO 339/43077

x *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 11.7.1916

xi See ix

xii WW1 Army Medal Index

xiii See viii

xiv See ix

xv See ix

xvi The Worcester Regiment in the Great War 1914-1919, p 169-172

xvii See ix

xviii British Army Service Records

xix See viii

Illustrations

Figure 1 Shill, Ray, 2013.*Workshop of the World: Birmingham Industrial Heritage Legacy*. *The History Press, Stroud. Permission to use the photograph granted by Sarah Rider, Web and Data Manager,The History Press by e-mail 27.10.2016* https://reader.bookshout.com/books/workshop-of-the-world/book_data/scroll.

Figure 1 See v

Figure 2 See xvi, p 68

Figure 3 La Boisselle
http://www.worcestershireregiment.com/bat_10_1916.php

Figure 4 Thiepval Memorial
https://sherpalaura.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/belgium-2011-023.jpg