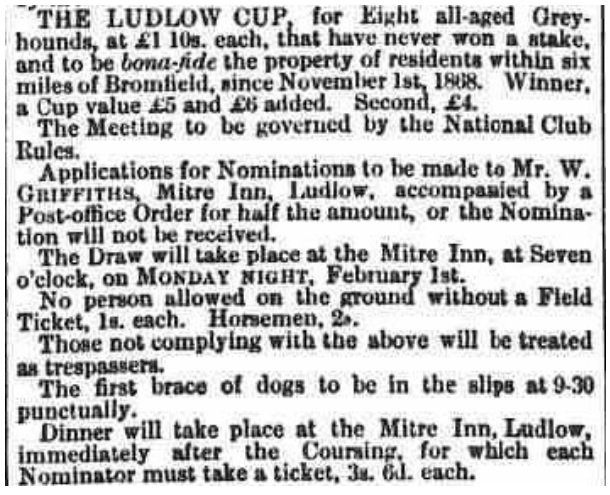
Gunner Henry Arthur Griffiths

On the 18th November 1916, British Commander in Chief Sir Douglas Haig called a halt to his offensive near the Somme River in north-western France, ending the epic Battle of the Somme after more than four months of bloody conflict. There was, however no real let up in the hostilities. Sniping, shelling and trench raids continued.

Henry's grandfather, William Griffiths (born c1826, in Montgomeryshire), married a Shropshire girl, Eliza Powell, on 4th June 1860.[i] Eliza was the daughter of William Powell (Henry's great grandfather), a well-to-do farmer. At the time of Eliza's birth in 1832 her father ran a farm near Bitterley, Shropshire with help of his wife Ann.[ii] By 1851 William Powell had moved to the Farm House, Cleobury North near Bridgnorth, with his family.

A year after their marriage, Eliza and William are recorded in the census for that year as farming in Lydiates, near Brimfield, Tenbury. William's younger brother Thomas was also employed in running the farm with the assistance of two agricultural labourers, two waggoners and a dairy maid.

Their first son, William Powell Griffiths, was born in the spring of 1861 and Charles (Henry's father), in the summer of 1871.[iii] By the time of Charles' birth, William had given up the farm and had become the innkeeper of the Mitre Inn in Stanton Lacy near Ludlow (see below).



THE LUDLOW CUP, for Eight all-aged Greyhounds, at £1 10s. each, that have never won a stake, and to be *bona-fide* the property of residents within six miles of Bromfield, since November 1st, 1868. Winner, a Cup value £5 and £6 added. Second, £4.

The Meeting to be governed by the National Club Rules.

Applications for Nominations to be made to Mr. W. GRIFFITHS, Mitre Inn, Ludlow, accompanied by a Post-office Order for half the amount, or the Nomination will not be received.

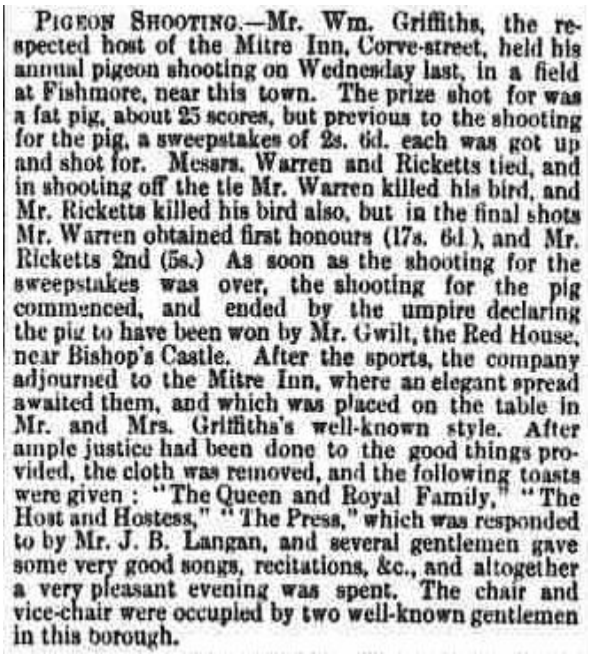
The Draw will take place at the Mitre Inn, at Seven o'clock, on MONDAY NIGHT, February 1st.

No person allowed on the ground without a Field Ticket, 1s. each. Horsemen, 2s.

Those not complying with the above will be treated as trespassers.

The first brace of dogs to be in the slips at 9-30 punctually.

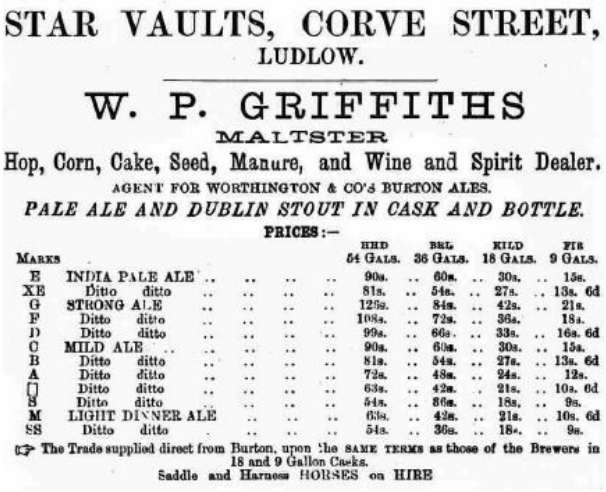
Dinner will take place at the Mitre Inn, Ludlow, immediately after the Coursing, for which each Nominator must take a ticket, 3s. 6d. each.



PIGEON SHOOTING.—Mr. Wm. Griffiths, the respected host of the Mitre Inn, Corve-street, held his annual pigeon shooting on Wednesday last, in a field at Fishmore, near this town. The prize shot for was a fat pig, about 25 scores, but previous to the shooting for the pig, a sweepstakes of 2s. 6d. each was got up and shot for. Messrs. Warren and Ricketts tied, and in shooting off the tie Mr. Warren killed his bird, and Mr. Ricketts killed his bird also, but in the final shots Mr. Warren obtained first honours (17s. 6d.), and Mr. Ricketts 2nd (5s.) As soon as the shooting for the sweepstakes was over, the shooting for the pig commenced, and ended by the umpire declaring the pig to have been won by Mr. Gwilt, the Red House, near Bishop's Castle. After the sports, the company adjourned to the Mitre Inn, where an elegant spread awaited them, and which was placed on the table in Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths's well-known style. After ample justice had been done to the good things provided, the cloth was removed, and the following toasts were given: "The Queen and Royal Family," "The Host and Hostess," "The Press," which was responded to by Mr. J. B. Langan, and several gentlemen gave some very good songs, recitations, &c., and altogether a very pleasant evening was spent. The chair and vice-chair were occupied by two well-known gentlemen in this borough.

Figure 1: Above and right newspaper cuttings which illustrate some of the activities held at the Mitre Inn in 1868 and 1869 by Henry's grandfather.

On 16th February 1872 William died, aged 50 years, leaving Eliza to bring up William, aged 11, and Charles, just over 6 months old, alone.[iv] The 1881 census recorded William Powell Griffiths, as head of the family at the tender age of twenty-two years old, and resident with his mother, Eliza, and Charles at Imperial Vaults, 99 Ludlow Street, Ludlow. William's occupation was noted as 'wine merchant' but by 1884, he had also set himself up as an agent for Worthington & Co Burton Ales.[v] The family retained their farming interests until 15th March 1890 when their farming stock and agricultural machinery were put up for sale by auction.[vi]



STAR VAULTS, CORVE STREET,
LUDLOW.

W. P. GRIFFITHS
MALTSTER
Hop, Corn, Cake, Seed, Manure, and Wine and Spirit Dealer.
AGENT FOR WORTHINGTON & CO's BURTON ALES.
PALE ALE AND DUBLIN STOUT IN CASK AND BOTTLE.
PRICES:—

Marks		HHD 54 Gals.	BRL 36 Gals.	KILD 18 Gals.	FIR 9 Gals.
E	INDIA PALE ALE	90s.	60s.	30s.	15s.
XE	Ditto ditto	81s.	54s.	27s.	13s. 6d
G	STRONG ALE	126s.	84s.	42s.	21s.
F	Ditto ditto	108s.	72s.	36s.	18s.
D	Ditto ditto	99s.	66s.	33s.	16s. 6d
C	MILD ALE	90s.	60s.	30s.	15s.
B	Ditto ditto	81s.	54s.	27s.	13s. 6d
A	Ditto ditto	72s.	48s.	24s.	12s.
[illegible]	Ditto ditto	63s.	42s.	21s.	10s. 6d
S	Ditto ditto	54s.	36s.	18s.	9s.
M	LIGHT DINNER ALE	63s.	42s.	21s.	10s. 6d
SS	Ditto ditto	54s.	36s.	18s.	9s.

☞ The Trade supplied direct from Burton, upon the SAME TERMS as those of the Brewers in 18 and 9 Gallon Casks.
Saddle and Harness HORSES on HIRE

Figure 2: Advertisement for W P Griffiths

Figure 3: Ludlow Grammar School

The WW1 memorial for Ludlow Grammar School, now Ludlow College, lists Charles as a past pupil.[vii] Founded in c1200, it is one of the oldest schools in the country. At the age of twenty-four Charles married Mary Ann Elizabeth Maskell in St Laurence's Church, Ludlow on 22nd January 1895.[viii] In the 1901 census, Charles, a butcher, and his wife, known as Elizabeth[ix], were recorded as living at 26 Bull Ring, Ludlow with their three sons, Charles Frank, born on 18th December 1895, Henry Arthur, born 17th March 1897 and Thomas Maskell born later that year.[x] In addition Charles's mother Eliza resided with them as did a nephew of Charles, one of two butcher's assistants, together with a general servant and a domestic nurse.

By 1911 the family had moved to St Leonard's cottage, Ludlow with their three sons and two daughters, Gertrude Mary, born in 1905 and Kittie Gardner born in 1909. Henry was fourteen years old. There are few records to illuminate what happened to Henry after this. One index 'Soldiers Who Died in the Great War 1914-1919' records that Henry was a resident of Moseley, Birmingham and a

Gunner, No 73284 in the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA), and another, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Registration Report Form, that Henry was in the 47th Siege Battery. [xi]

The war diary for the 47th Siege Battery records that the date of embarkation from Southampton was 26th November 1915. The battery arrived in Boulogne at 10 am the following day.[xii] The battery would include

- Personnel: 5 officers and 177 other ranks
- Horses: 17 riding, 6 draught and 80 heavy draught
- Transport: 3 two-horse carts, 10 four-horse wagons

Three batteries would normally be under the command of a Siege Brigade. The brigade would also include an Ammunition Column of:

- Personnel: 3 officers and 104 other ranks
- Horses: 13 riding, 2 draught and 72 heavy draught
- Transport: 1 two-horse carts, 16 four-horse wagons
- **Mark VI** [xiii]

The war diary on 22nd June 1916 refers to the Battery being supplied with the new Mark VI gun[xiv] which was a howitzer, a type of artillery piece characterized by a relatively short barrel and the use of comparatively small propellant charges to propel projectiles on a relatively high trajectory, with a steep angle of descent.

Figure 4: A 6-inch howitzer with girdles on the wheels to make it easier to move in the muddy conditions of 1916

However, when the Battery first arrived in France it had to make do with the old howitzer systems. Slowly the 37th Siege Battery made their way with their artillery via Hazenbrouck to Vlamertinghe, but not without difficulty, as one of the guns became ditched en route causing much delay. The Battery spent the next six months based in this sector using their howitzers to bombard lines NE of Ypres, and German strongholds at Stirling Castle, St Eloi, Hill 60, Hooge, Hollebeke, the Ypres-Camines Canal as well as the heads of mine shafts, the registration of targets being carried out by aeroplane. On the 19th December, the Battery experienced its first taste of gas liberated from the German lines.[xv]

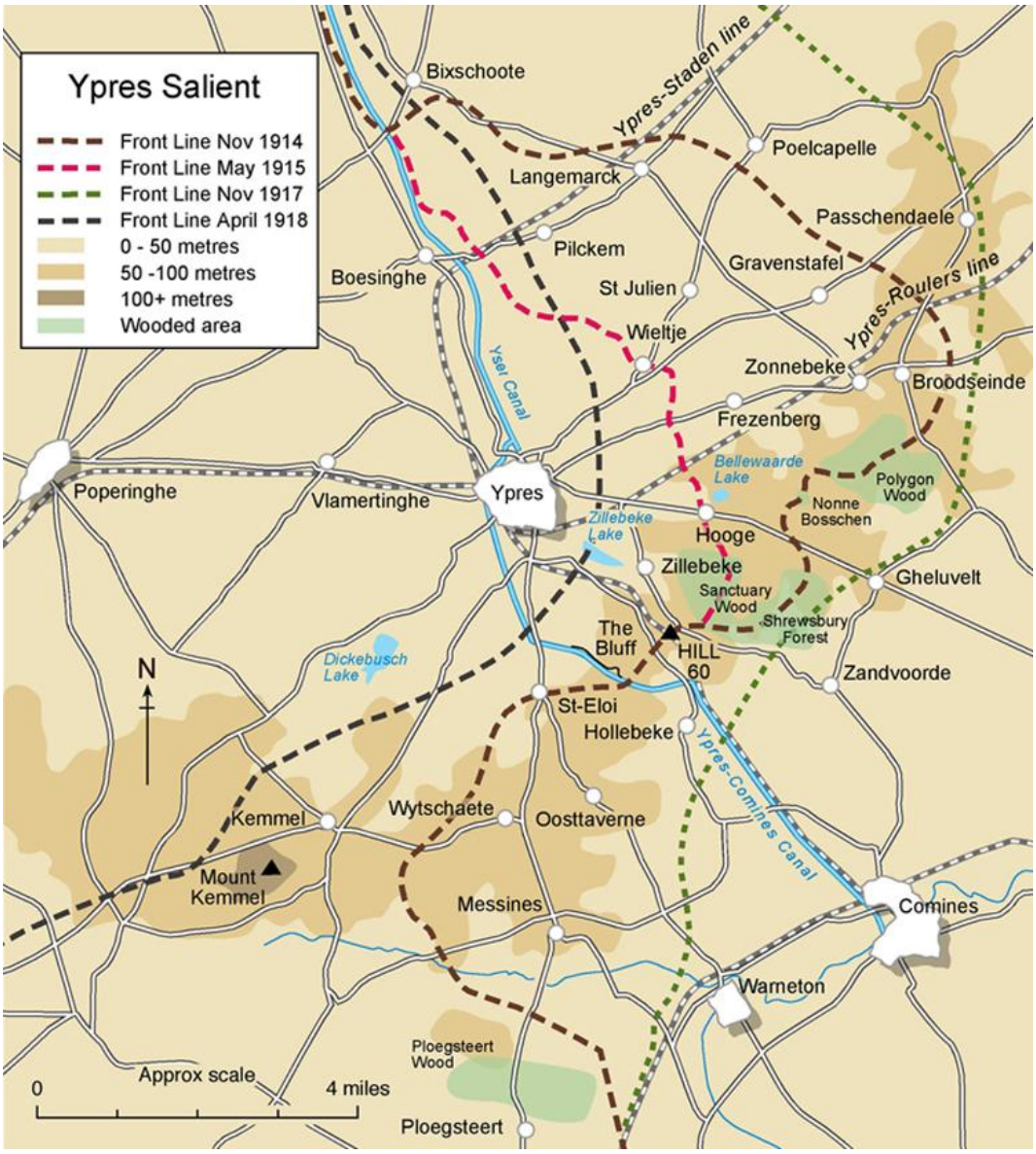


Figure 5: Map of the Ypres area showing the location of Vlamertonghe, Hooge, Hollebeke, St Eloi and the Ypres-Comines Canal

Between the 14th and 17th June 1916, the Battery moved from Vlamertinghe via Morlancourt to Bray-sur-Somme, where they were attached to the 14th Heavy Artillery Group part of the 4th Army. On 26th June, the Battery received the new Mark VI howitzers which they found to be 'very satisfactory'.[xvi] The Mark VI Vickers design was very similar to the old 8-inch howitzer. The new version was first approved for production in August 1915. The first substantial order was placed in March 1916 for 50 howitzers, with 30 more in the autumn. It was 4–5 tonnes lighter than the improvised 8-inch howitzers Marks I – V. The Mark VI barrel was of built-up construction and had a calibre of 6 inches. It could fire shells at a rate of 2 rounds per minute, with a maximum range of 9,500 to 11,400 yards, depending on elevation. [xvii]

On the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the Battery was based at Bray-sur-Somme and from the 9th July at Mametz. During this time, the Battery registered and targeted Bazentin-le Grand, Fricourt, Martinpuich, the 2nd line of the German trenches between Bazentin and Longueval, and Longueval to Deville Wood and Flers. By the 31st July 8459 rounds had been delivered onto the German lines.[xviii]

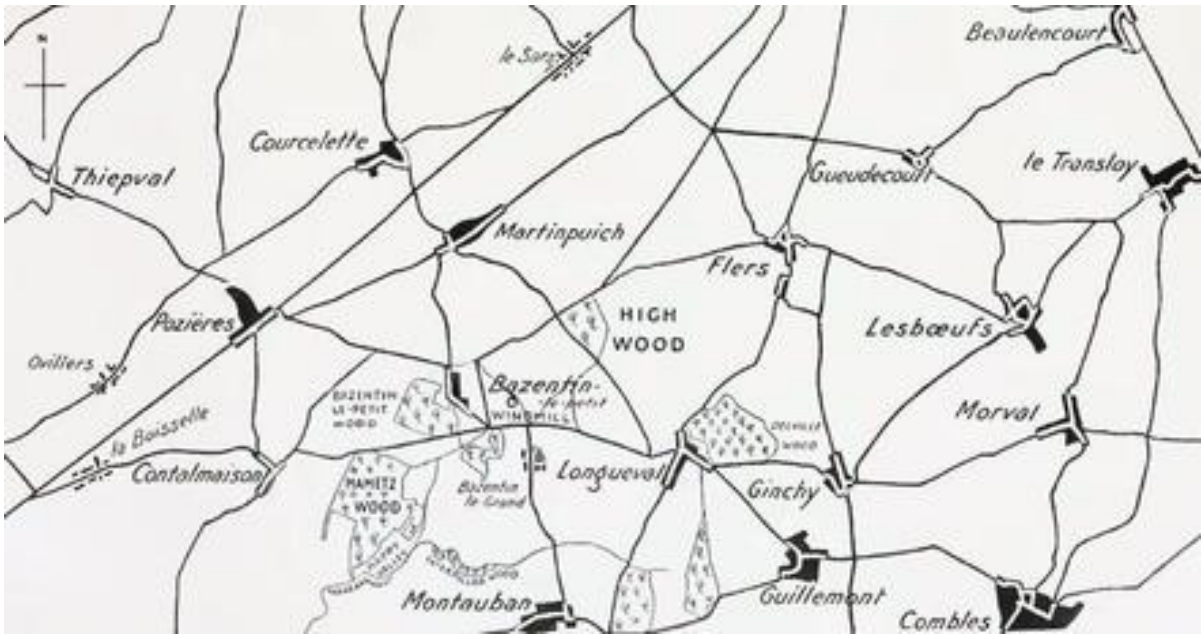


Figure 3: Map of the Transloy Ridge

From August through to November the Battery was still based at Mametz but from 1st November through to the end of December at Longueval. In this period of time, the Battery registered their guns on to the German trenches around Guedecourt, Ligny-Thilloy and Beaulencourt. It was on the 19th December 1916 that Henry's luck ran out when he and four others in his Battery were killed by an enemy shell.[xix] Henry was only 19 years old when he died.

Henry is buried at Bernafay Wood British Cemetery near Montauban. At the time of his death his parents, Charles and Mary Ann Elizabeth were living at 11 Pitville Street, Cheltenham.[xx]

Henry is also commemorated at St Mary's Church, Moseley, the Hall of Memory, Birmingham and at Ludlow Grammar School.

Figure 4: (Above left) St Mary's Church WW1 memorial

(Above right) Bernafay Wood British Cemetery

(Right) Birmingham Hall of Memory

Henry's elder brother, Charles Frank Griffiths, served in WW1 as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Machine Gun Corps. He survived and in 1939 was living at 12 Chapel Row, Ludlow with his wife Ida and daughter Dorothy.

Written by Edwina Rees

Researched by Edwina Rees and Jim Hone

Endnotes

i Shropshire marriages, 1860

ii 1841 census

iii England & Wales Births 1837-2006

iv *Shrewsbury Chronicle,* 16th February 1872

v *Ludlow Advertiser*, 6th December 1884

vi *Wellington Journal,* 15thMarch, 1890

vii Imperial War Museum
http://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/37967

viii Shropshire Marriages, 1895

ix The 1901 census records only the one name Elizabeth

x England & Wales births 1837-2007
Shropshire baptisms

xi Battle of Vimy Ridge Battle Order
http://www.worldheritage.org/article/WHEBN0022704839/Battle%20of%20Vimy%20Ridge%20order%20of%20battle

xii National Archives, War Diary for the 47th Siege Battery, Ref WO 95/465/4, p 9

xiii The Long, Long Trail
http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/definitions-of-units/what-was-a-siege-battery-of-the-royal-garrison-artillery/

xiv See xii, p 23

xv See xii, pp 9-12

xvi See xii, p 23

xvii BL 6-inch 26 cwt howitzer
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BL_6-inch_26_cwt_howitzer

xviii See xii, pp 23-25

xix See xii, pp 26-40

xx Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Illustrations

Figure 1 *The Wellington Journal and Shrewsbury* News, 23rd January 1869
The Wellington Journal and Shrewsbury News, 19th December 1868

Figure 2 *Ludlow Advertiser,* 6th December 1884

Figure 3 Grammar School, Ludlow, Shropshire. 9/52 H.G.. Lantern Slide. Shrewsbury Museums Service (SHYMS: P/2005/0748). Image sy9591

Figure 4 A 6-inch howitzer in 1916
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BL_6-inch_26_cwt_howitzer

Figure 5 Ypres Salient
http://oakbaychronicles.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/map-ypres-salient-@72.jpg

Figure 6 Transloy Ridge
http://forum.irishmilitaryonline.com/showthread.php?9058-The-Somme-Day-by-Day/page5