

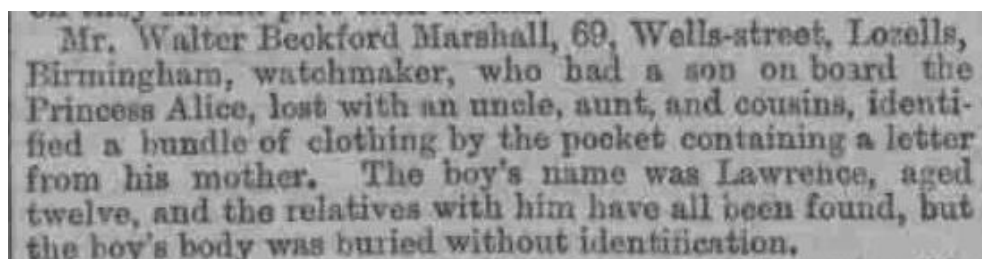
Lieutenant Philip Spencer Marshall

"I died in hell (They called it Passchendaele)" by Siegfried Sassoon

William's great-grandfather, also called William, was born around 1791 in Easenhall, Warwickshire. By 1841 he had become a watchmaker and was working in Clarekenwell, London, a centre for artisans, with many streets almost wholly occupied by workmen engaged in the various subdivisions of watch making, such as escapement making, engine turning, fusee cutting (a conical pulley that improved the timekeeping of a watch), springing, secret springing, and finishing.ⁱ William had six children with his wife Eliza Maria, two of whom, Alfred (born c1829) and Walter Beckford (born 1834) formed a partnership with him working from the family home at 11 Green Terrace, Clerkenwell.ⁱⁱ The house was a ten roomed corner residence, opposite the reservoir of the New River Company and adapted for the residence of a 'respectable family' and at the same time combined the advantage of good workshops with a separate entrance from the street.ⁱⁱⁱ

On 31st August 1861, Walter married Betsy, daughter of Richard Williams, a farmer/market gardener, from Welling in the Parish of Bexley, Kent at the church of St James, Clarkenwell.^{iv}

At the time of the birth of their first child, Philip Walter on 18th June 1862, the couple were resident in Clarence Street, Islington.^v By 1864, however, Walter and Betsy had relocated to Warstone Lane, Hockley the heart of the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham where their second child Hugh was born. Over the next ten years five further children were born, Lawrence (1866), Walter Francis (1868), Amy Rosa (1870), Ernest Sydney (1871) and Esther Edith in 1874. Their family life was not without tragedy as Hugh died, aged 7 years old and Lawrence was drowned when he was 12 years old when the *SS Princess Alice*, a paddle steamer was in collision with the collier, the *Bywell Castle* off Tripcock Point on the Thames with the loss of 650 lives on 3rd September 1878.^{vi} Lawrence was with his aunt, uncle and cousins on a 'Moonlit Trip' to Gravesend and back when the accident occurred at 7.45 pm.^{vii} (See Fig 1 below)



Mr. Walter Beckford Marshall, 69, Wells-street, Lozells, Birmingham, watchmaker, who had a son on board the Princess Alice, lost with an uncle, aunt, and cousins, identified a bundle of clothing by the pocket containing a letter from his mother. The boy's name was Lawrence, aged twelve, and the relatives with him have all been found, but the boy's body was buried without identification.



Figure 1: Contemporary engraving of the *Bywell Castle* bearing down on the *SS Princess Alice*

It was the greatest loss of life in any Thames shipping disaster. At the time there was no official body responsible for marine safety in the Thames.

Philip Walter Marshall, Walter's eldest son, married Jessie Spencer in the autumn of 1891. At the time of his marriage, Philip was working in the family business as a cashier and living with his parents in 69 Wills Street, Aston.^{viii}

By 1901, Philip and Jessie had two children, Jessie Gwendoline (born 1894) and Philip Spencer (born 16th December 1896^{ix}), They lived at 186 Church Hill Road, Handsworth, Birmingham. Philip was the general manager at a lacquer manufacturing business.

A third child, a daughter, Evelyn Mary was born on 25th September 1904. At the time of her birth the family were resident at 69, St Peter's Road, Handsworth where they remained living until at least 1911.^x

Philip Spencer Marshall (known as Spencer) was admitted to King Edward's School, New Street, Birmingham in January 1906. He was awarded a Foundation Scholarship in 1907 and 1909.

Spencer was an active member of the school community. He played in the 1st XV (1914-15) and was described in the school magazine as an '*energetic forward, both in the loose and tight. A good tackle, but a poor kick. Captain of Richards'* (sic). Spencer was awarded his colours after a match against Bromsgrove in

1915. He also dabbled in athletics, and came joint 2nd in the half-mile race in 1914 with a time of 2 minutes 19 seconds and 2nd in the 120 yards hurdles in a time of 19.5 seconds.^{xi}

In his maiden speech for the school Debating Society in October 1914, Spencer, seemingly keen to impress his peers, remarked that;

One of the greatest calamities caused by the abolition of war would be the cessation of the OTC, while Dreadnoughts would have to become pleasure boats. War breaks up the monotony of geography by altering the map.^{xii}

Two years later he might have thought differently!



Figure 2: King Edward School Debating Society. Spencer is in the second row, fourth along from the right. See picture left

Spencer was a Lance Corporal in the school Officer Training Corps (OTC) in 1913. By the time he left school in 1915 he had been promoted to Sergeant.^{xiii}



Figure 3: Phillip Spencer Marshall

On leaving school, Spencer joined the 2/3rd South Birmingham Brigade (Reserve) of the Royal Field Artillery (RFA). On 28th January 1915 he applied for a commission and was gazetted, two weeks on 10th February. The Brigade became the 307th Brigade, part of the 2nd line 61st (South Midland) Division, RFA.^{xiv} At the time of his commission the family address was 'Shenfield', Grove Avenue, Moseley.^{xv}

On 24th May 1916 the 307th Brigade entrained at Amesbury for Southampton with a contingent of twenty-six officers, 597 Other Ranks, 560 horses, 16 guns, 45 four-wheeled wagons and 10 two-wheeled wagons. They

remained at anchor for a day off Netley Hospital before sailing for Le Havre at 6.30 pm the following day, 25th May. Spencer was an officer in 'B' Battery and on arrival proceeded to Number 5 Rest Camp at Merville.^{xvi}

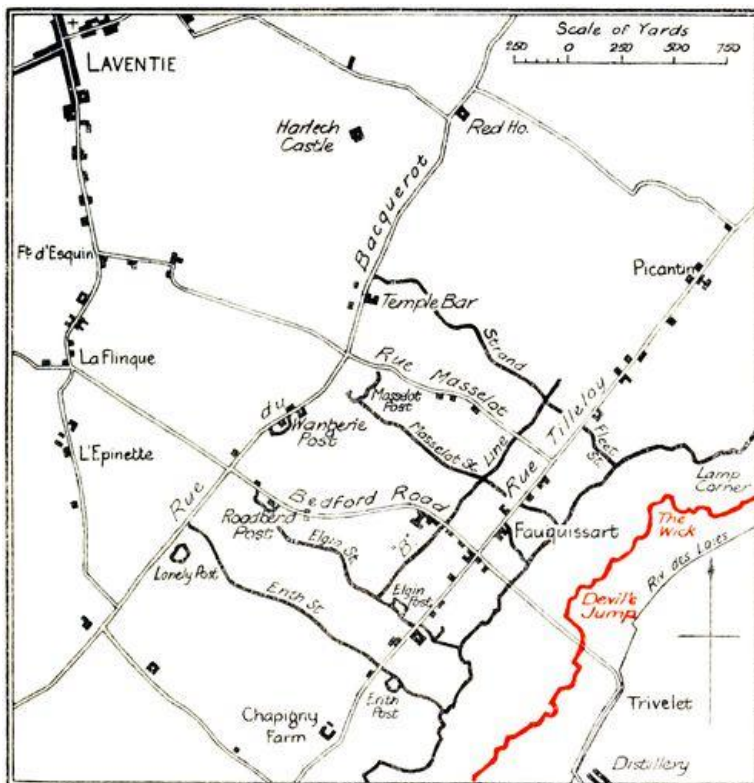


Figure 4: Map showing the location of Laventie and Fauquissart in relation to the British and German front line

By the 11th June 1916, the 307th Brigade RFA was in action at Laventie directing their fire on the German lines at Fauquissart, in support of the 61st Division with their artillery.

On 1st July, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the Brigade diary complains of 'faulty fuses' causing their artillery rounds to fall short. This problem might have impacted on the outcome of the 61st Divisions first major action in an attack on Fromelles on 19th to 20th July in what turned out to be an unmitigated disaster.

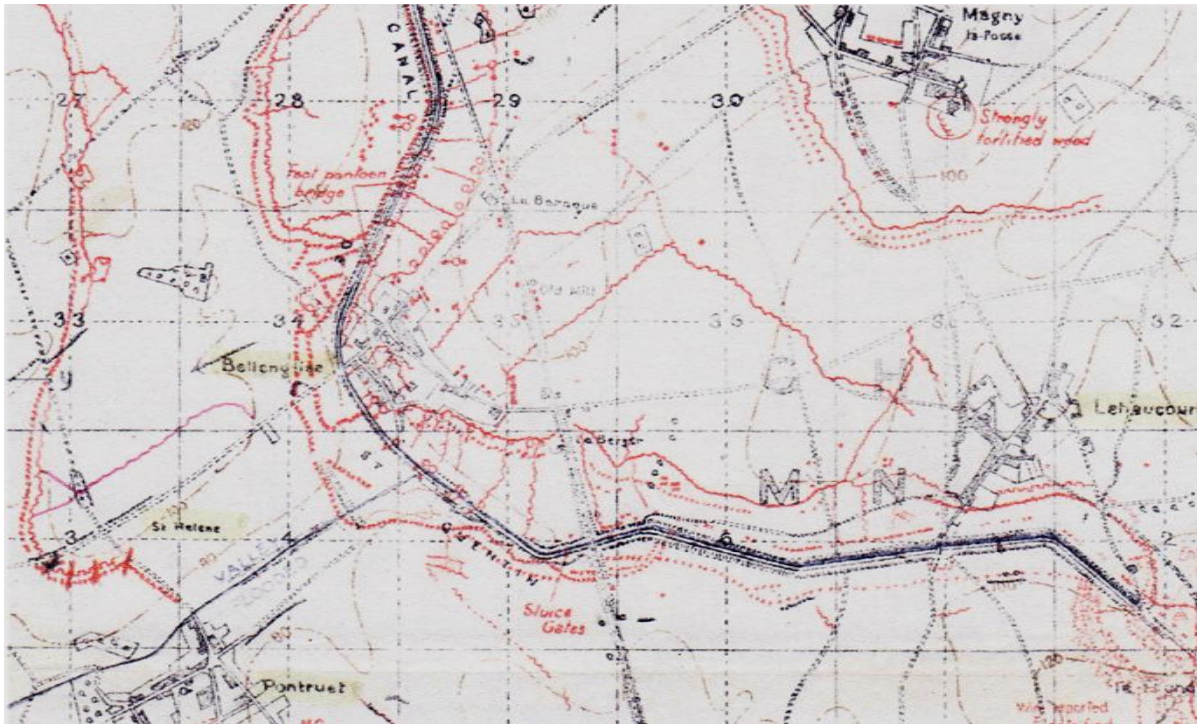


Figure 5: Map showing the location of Bellenglise, Lehaucourt, St Helene and Portruet

Later that year, in August, the 61st Division was in action on the Ypres salient and involved in efforts to push the front line forward to positions around Schuler Farm and Aisne Farm near Kerselar, referred to as the Battle of Langemarck a phase of the Third Battle of Ypres better known as Passchendaele.

Spencer was killed at dawn near Ypres on 15th August 1917 when an enemy shell hit a nearby ammunition dump on the eve of the battle.

In a letter to Spencer's parents, his Commanding Officer wrote of him:

I can assure you that he met his death like a true soldier; at the time he was on duty by the side of his Battery Commander, who was very severely wounded at the same time. The battery was moving up to a forward position in the early morning, 15th inst, after having taken part in an intense bombardment. The whole district was under hostile fire at the time: As they were passing a large dump of ammunition, a large enemy shell struck it and caused a terrible explosion and your son was killed instantaneously and not in the least disfigured...needless to say, he is greatly missed from every point of view. He had many friends in the Brigade and I can truly say I was one of them. He never passed my headquarters without calling in and I was always pleased to see him.^{xviii}

He is buried in Vlamertinghe New Military Cemetery, Flanders, and his headstone reads: *He willingly followed the path of duty and self-sacrifice.* Spencer was only twenty years old when he was killed.



Figure 6: An early photograph of Vlamertinghe New Military Cemetery, Flanders

Spencer left his estate of £251 16s 8d to his father, who applied for his medals in August 1921 and also the plaque and scroll given to the next of kin of men and women whose deaths were attributable to the Great War. He is also commemorated on the war memorials of St Agnes' Church and St Mary's Church, Moseley, KES, Edgbaston and is on the Roll of Honour at Birmingham Hall of Memory.

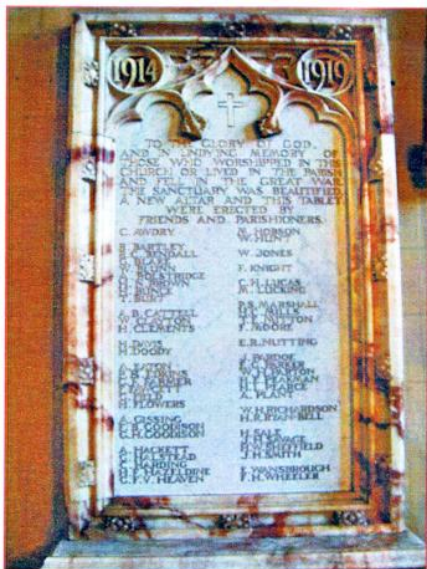


Figure 8

(Left) St Agnes Church WW1 memorial

(Right) St Mary's Church WW1 memorial



Written and research by Edwina Rees, Moseley Society History Group with thanks to Alison Wheatley, archivist, King Edward's School, Edgbaston

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Endnotes

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- i England: Where watchmaking all began
<http://www.watchpro.com/england-where-watchmaking-all-began/>
 - ii London, Church of England, Births and Baptisms, 1813-1902
Morning Post, 23rd July 1856
 - iii *The Morning Advertiser*, 27th April 1867
 - iv London, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1921
 - v London, Church of England, Births and Baptisms, 1815-1966
 - vi *SS Princess Alice*
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS_Princess_Alice_\(1865\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS_Princess_Alice_(1865))
 - vii *The Standard*, 6th November 1878
 - viii England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915, 1891, Aston,, 3/4, 6d, 499
 - ix a) National Archives, Officers after 1914, Ref WO 374/46286
b) De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour
 - x Birmingham, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813-1912
 - xi *Birmingham Daily Post*, 26th June 1914
 - xii From the archives of King Edward School, Edgbaston with thanks to Alison Wheatley, archivist

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- xiii *Birmingham Daily Post*, 22.8.1917
National Archives, Officers after 1914, Ref WO 374/46286
- xiv See ix (b)
The RFA 1914-1918, The Long, Long Trail
http://www.1914-1918.net/rfa_units%20-%20oldversion.htm
- xv National Archives, Officers after 1914, Ref WO 374/46286
- xvi War Diaries Royal Horse Artillery/Royal Field Artillery, 307th Brigade, Ref 3043/1-5.
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See ix (b)
- xvii See ix (b)
- xviii See ix (b)

Illustrations

- Figure 1 *The Standard*, 6th November 1878
- Figure 2 *The SS Princess Alice*
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS_Princess_Alice_\(1865\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS_Princess_Alice_(1865))
- Figure 3 Debating Society of King Edward School. Edgbaston With thanks to Alison Wheatley, archivist, King Edward School, Edgbaston
- Figure 4 Philip Spencer Marshall from the De Ruvigny's Roll of Honour
- Figure 5 Laventie map
http://mirrorservice.org/sites/gutenberg.org/5/0/0/9/50098/50098-h/images/i_b_224fp.jpg
- Figure 6 Fromelles
http://images.slideplayer.com/13/4150115/slides/slide_3.jpg
- Figure 7 Vlamertinghe New Military Cemetery
<https://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/gallery/35887>