

Second Lieutenant Frank Goodheart Procter

The 1841 census records Frank's grandfather, William (born c1816) as a Birmingham born gun maker. By 1851, William had moved to Shoreditch, London with his wife Ellen and five children, having obtained employment there as a gun finisher. Two further children were born to Ellen and William during their time in London, one of them being Frank's father, also named William, in 1855.ⁱ

By 1871, the family had returned to live in Aston, Birmingham and in the next census in 1881, grandfather William is recorded as an 'inspector of small arms (gun)' and Frank's father, William (junior), as a 'clerk in a church Poor House'.

Two years later, on 1st February 1883, William (junior), married Sarah, the daughter of Thomas Smith, a gardener, at St Mary's Church, Moseley, Birmingham.ⁱⁱ

The census of 1891, records that William and Sarah, had moved to their own accommodation at 77 Smallbrook Street (razed to the ground in 1958 to make way for Smallbrook Queensway)ⁱⁱⁱ. This is where his first born son, William Thomas, was born on 14th January 1886, followed by Arthur in 1887.^{iv}

William had by then set up in business as a tailor and by 1901 he was doing well enough to move out of the city centre to 41 Oakfield Road, Balsall Heath and to employ the services of a domestic housemaid to assist Sarah after the birth of two more children, Frank Goodheart on 28th September 1892 and Ethel Clara on 15th December 1895.^v

The family continued to prosper, and by 1911, William was a 'master tailor', and had moved to 91 Trafalgar Road, Moseley. All three sons attended King Edward's School, Camp Hill,^{vi} and joined the family business on completing their education.

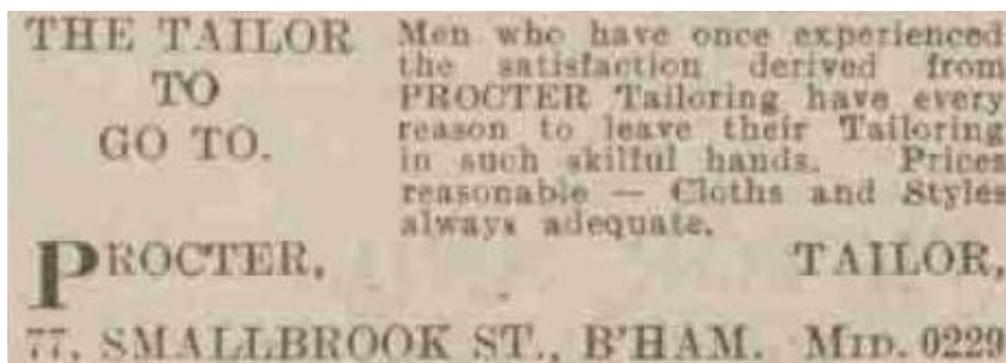


Figure 1: Advertisement for Procter Tailors

Frank's father had at one time been a volunteer in the Old Warwickshire volunteers and attained the rank of sergeant. He was renowned as a famous rifle shot, competing in the final stages for the Queen's and King's Prize, a small bore rifle competition. He had also competed in International Competitions.^{vii}

It is unsurprising that when war was declared in August 1914, all three of William's sons volunteered to serve in the armed forces.

Frank enlisted in the 14th Battalion, (1st Birmingham Pals) Royal Warwickshire Regiment (14th Royal Warwicks) on 8th September 1914 for three years with the colours. He was tall for his age, standing at 6' 2³/₄". Frank's attestation papers describe him as fresh faced with hazel eyes and brown hair and weighing 146 lbs. Private F G Procter, No 14/769 was attached to 'C' Coy, Platoon X. Frank was appointed Lance Corporal (unpaid) on 27th February 1915. The photograph below must have been taken around this time as Frank is named as two men at this rank in the photo.^{viii}

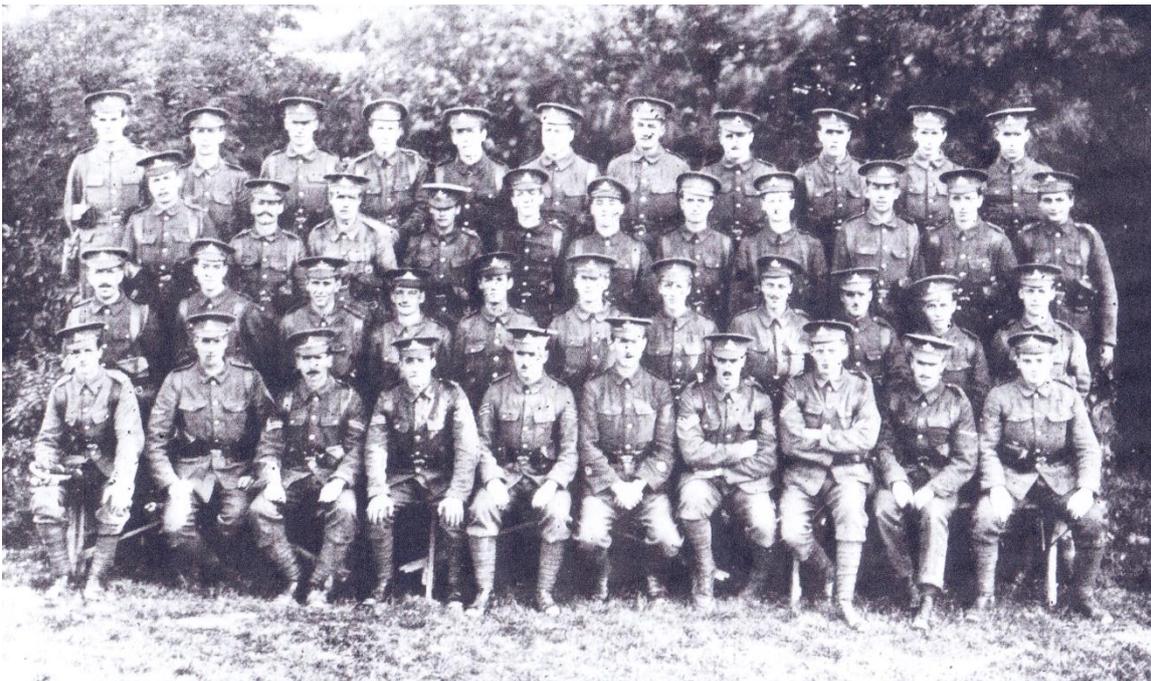


Figure 2: Frank must be either the first left or second right on the front row of this photograph

On 10th June 1915, Frank was appointed to the position of Lance Corporal (paid). Five months later, having completed his training, Frank and his battalion were posted to France to join the British Expeditionary Force. Leaving Folkestone aboard *SS Invecta*, the 14th Royal Warwicks arrived at Boulogne at 10 am on 22nd November 1915.^{ix}

During the next months the battalion continued their training and experienced the realities of trench warfare. The 14th Royal Warwicks were fortunate not to be in the front line on Christmas day and enjoyed a hearty meal and a pint of Bass beer to celebrate.

As the preparations for the Somme offensive proceeded the work of the Battalion became more dangerous and difficult. At the start of the Battle of the Somme on 1st July 1916 the 14th Royal Warwicks, part of the 13th Brigade, 5th Division, were in reserve, billeted around Magnicourt and preparing for a proposed attack at Wailly, but because of the losses in the Battle of the Somme, this attack was cancelled and new orders to proceed to the Somme as quickly as possible were received on 13th July. A series of night marches to ameliorate the hot dusty conditions of the day were organised to their new destination. Those who fell out on the long marches were picked up by lorry.^x



Figure 3
Lt Arthur Procter

It would have been around that time Frank would have learnt of his brother Arthur's death on the first day of the Battle of the Somme in an attack to capture the German stronghold referred to as the 'Quadrilateral' on the Redan Ridge. Arthur was a Lieutenant in the 1/8 Royal Warwickshire Regiment. He had been awarded the Military Cross for his actions a few months earlier in a 'Special Enterprise', on 22nd March 1916. The 1/8 Royal Warwicks suffered 598 casualties on 1st July 1916. Arthur was one of a hundred and seventy-seven other men from the Battalion whose bodies were never found and are commemorated on the Thiepval memorial.^{xi}

At what point Frank became unwell is not known, but on 20th July 1916 he was invalided home with Trench Fever. Trench fever was an unpleasant disease caused by body lice. The incubation period was relatively long, at about two weeks. The onset of symptoms is usually sudden, with high fever, severe headache, pain on moving the eyeballs, soreness of the muscles of the legs and back and frequently increases of sensitivity of the shins. It was painful and took around twelve weeks to recover from it. For many soldiers, it was an illness that struck them more than once.

Frank was admitted to 4th Scottish General Hospital at Stobhill Glasgow on 22nd July and discharged twenty days later. He was transferred to the Military Convalescent Hospital in Alnwick where he remained until 25th October 1916.^{xii}



Figure 4: No 4 Scottish Hospital, Stobhill, Glasgow

After convalescence, Frank was posted to the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment. During his time in reserve, Frank applied for a commission. A month later he learnt that his application had been successful and on 1st December he was posted for instruction to No 13 Officer Cadet Battalion, Newmarket.



Figure 5: 2nd Lt F G Procter

On completion of his training, Frank was gazetted Second Lieutenant and posted to the 4th Battalion Cheshire Regiment (Territorial Force) on 27th March 1917 who were serving in Palestine.^{xiii}

It is unlikely that Frank ever joined the 4th Battalion in Palestine because, at the time of his death, his military records state that he was attached to the 1/6 Cheshire Regiment who served on the Western Front.

When Frank joined the 1/6 Cheshire Regiment, he found himself in the Ypres sector in Belgium. On 7th June an attack to capture the high ground around the south east of Ypres, the Messine Ridge, was successful and as a consequence further assaults were planned to capture the rest of the ridge based upon the same lines of attack.

The 1/6 Cheshire Regiment took part in the second Allied attack of the Third Battle of Ypres, now better known as Passchendaele, on 16th August 1917. The

Battle of Langemarck saw four days of fierce fighting resulted in a British victory, but the gains were small for the high number of casualties incurred.

The next major battle that the 1/6 Cheshire Regiment was engaged in was the fifth battle in the second phase of the Third Battle of Ypres. The area of attack was from the Menin road to Polygon Wood. It was scheduled for the end of September 1917.

On 19th September the Battalion, as part of the 39th Division, moved to their assembly positions in the Shrewsbury Forest sector ready to take over from the 41st Division. The advance was planned to cover 1,000-1,500 yards and stop on reverse slopes which were easier to defend, enclosing ground which gave observation of German reinforcement routes and counter-attack assembly areas.

The 39th Division attack began on 26th September 1917 at 5.50 am, with two Brigades. It was to capture the 'Quadrilateral', along the Bassevillebeek spur which commanded the area around Tower Hamlets. It was captured but soon after the Germans counter-attacked.



Figure 6: Map showing the positions of Shrewsbury Wood, Tower Hamlets and Gheluvelt in relation to the Ypres to Menin road in September 1917

The Brigade on the left pushed forward and passed through Tower Hamlets and reached the final objective and consolidated behind Tower Trench with an advanced post north-west of Gheluvert Wood. The right-hand Brigade had been caught in the boggy ground of the Bassevillebeek and after holding on all night, they were ultimately relieved during the night of the 27th September.

During the course of this action 2 officers were killed and two wounded. In the 'other ranks' (OR's) 49 were killed and 16 wounded. Subsequently 11 OR's died from their wounds and 51 posted as missing. Frank was one of the two officers wounded. He was evacuated to No 24 General Hospital based in Etaples where he died thirty-seven day's later from wounds received in action. He was twenty-five years old when he died. Frank is buried in Etaples Cemetery.^{xiv} He is also commemorated on the WW1 memorial at St Mary's Church, and St Anne's Church, Moseley and Birmingham Hall of Memory.

The attack, lasting until 3rd October, inflicted a severe blow on the German 4th Army, causing many losses, and threatened the German hold on Broodseinde ridge.^{xv}



**Figure 7: (Left) Frank's gravestone at Etaples Military Cemetery
(Middle) St Mary's Church, Moseley, WW1 memorial
(Right) St Anne's Church, Moseley WW1 memorial**

Frank's eldest brother enlisted in the Royal Navy Air Service (RNAS) on 25th May 1917 and became Aircraftman II WT Procter, No. 30598. On 11th August he was posted to East Fortune, near Edinburgh. East Fortune was established as an airship station in 1915 and a training school for pilots. On 25th November 1917 William was promoted to Aircraftman I before transferring to the RAF on 31st March 1918 when the RNAS and Royal Flying Corps were amalgamated. He was given a new number F 29684. The only surviving son, William carried on the family tailoring business.^{xvi}

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Endnotes

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- i 1851 census
 - ii Birmingham, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754-1937
England Select Marriages, 1538-1973
 - iii Inner Ring Road South.
<http://www.photobydijnorton.com/InnerRingRoadSouth.html>
 - iv Royal Navy of Seamen's, 1848-1939
England Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975
 - v National Archives, Officers after 1913, Ref WO 374/55449
Birmingham, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813-1912
 - vi *Birmingham Daily Post*, 8th July 1916
Birmingham Daily Mail, 7th November 1917
 - vii *Birmingham Daily Post*, 17th May 1916
 - viii National Archives, Officers after 1913, Ref WO 374/55449
 - ix Carter, Terry 1997. *Birmingham Pals*. Pen & Sword Books Ltd Barnsley, p 98
 - x See ix, p 166
 - xi For further information on 2nd Lt Arthur Proctor see the article on the 1916 Moseley Society History Society website
 - xii See viii

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- xiii *London Gazette*, 17th April 1917, Issue 30022, page 3610
- xiv *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 7th November 1917
War Diary 1/6 Cheshire Regiment WO 95/2590, p 26
National Archives, Officers after 1913, Ref WO 374/55449
- xv Battle of Polygon wood
<http://ozebook.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Battle-of-Polygon-Wood.pdf>
War Diary 1/6 Cheshire Regiment WO 95/2590, pp 25,26
- xvi British Royal Navy Seamen, 1899-1924
British Royal Air Force Airmen's Service Records, 1912-1939

Illustrations

- Figure 1 *Birmingham Mail*, 20 July 1940
- Figure 2 Birmingham City Battalions Book of Honour, 1920
- Figure 3 *Birmingham Mail*, 17th May 1916
- Figure 4 No 4 Scottish Hospital, Glasgow
<https://historic-hospitals.com/gazetteer/glasgow/>
- Figure 5 *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 7th November 1917
- Figure 6 Map of the Battle of Polgon Wood, September 1917
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/35403/35403-h/35403-h.htm>
- Figure 7 Gravestone of Frank Goodheart Procter
<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/10896886>