#### **Private**

### **WALTER CHARLES PRING**

19064, 8<sup>™</sup> Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry

Died of Wounds 31 July 1916

Aged 21

**Buried Bebington Cemetery, Cheshire** 

L. C. of E. 77

The Pring family were, almost without exception, agricultural workers and, by the time of Walter's father's generation, solidly fixed in the Blackdown Hills. His grandfather Charles was born in Broadway, and his grandmother Hannah at Haselbury Plucknett, near Crewkerne. But his father George and mother Annie (nee Every, daughter of Robert Every, a lime burner) were born in Buckland St Mary.

They had seven children, 3 boys and 4 girls, all of whom survived childhood; it was WW1 that took two of the boys, Walter and William. Walter was the oldest son, his sister Emma the oldest of the family. Walter, and William, went to Brown Down School; Walter, born on 27 August 1894, entered school on the 17 March 1902, and left on 27 August 1907, his thirteenth birthday. Both boys were baptised at Otterford, Walter on 4 November 1894.

The family had moved about within the area of Buckland St Mary and Otterford, no doubt following work. In 1891, George, before his marriage, was working as a Farm Carter for William Manley, the miller, at Otterford Mill. George and Annie married at Buckland on 27 April 1893; by 1901 George was working as a Carter at Howstead; they had 5 children. In 1911 they were living at Hornsey Cottages; 4 of the children were still at home, but the 2 older girls were working away, and Walter, now 16, was living just down the road at Madgeon Farm, working as Farm Servant to Sidney Dummett.

Walter's Service Records have not survived, but we do have some pointers to what happened to him from press reports, the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diaries and contemporary accounts. *The Taunton Courier* reports that Walter and his friend Harry Painter enlisted together (in Taunton) on 29 May 1915, 'both going from the same farm in this parish, and great friends, and much respected in the parish'. We don't know which farm; for what it's worth, Harry was working at Pound Farm in 1911, and Walter, as we know, at Madgeon. On Walter's Medal Roll Card (kept as a record of what Service Medals were due to each man) is recorded the day he (and Harry Painter too) landed in France – 4 October 1915. His death certificate tells us he was with "D" Company of the Battalion.

After the Battle of Loos in the Autumn of 1915, there were no major operations for the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion who, after refitting, moved to Armentieres. They were part of the 63rd Brigade, 21<sup>st</sup> Division. They mounted a cutting out expedition from an area known as the Mushroom on December 16 which was conspicuously well planned and successful. It consisted of volunteers. It seems, perhaps, unlikely that 2 recently arrived recruits would have been involved in this. At the end of December Walter's "D" Company were taking over front line trenches when their Commanding Officer, Lt Col Howard, was killed by a sniper. They were in and out of the front line trenches during the first 3 months of 1916, and then on April 1 moved south from the Ypres Salient to the Somme, where troops were massing for the Somme attack of 1 July – another 'big push'.

There were immensely elaborate preparations going on for that attack. As well as day to day trench warfare the troops were expected to carry out these preparations, an exhausting business: digging new communication, assembly, assault and wire trenches, new dugouts, gun emplacements, and bringing up thousands of tons of ammunition and stores. And most of this work had to take place, unseen, at night. The writer C. Day Lewis describes the strange contrast: 'By day the roads were deserted; but as soon as dusk fell they were thick with transport, guns, ammunition trains and troops, all moving up...to take their positions in or behind the lines ...Endlessly, night after night, it went on ...Yet when dawn came, all signs of it were gone.'

The Somme had been a quiet part of the line. The British had the major disadvantage of occupying the lower river land, while the Germans held the heights – the drawbacks are obvious, and became more so as the attacks proceeded and the ground was churned up to a quagmire.



7.25 Front waves of B and C Coys crawled out.'

The preliminary bombardment began on 26<sup>th</sup> June and continued without respite till 1 July. The 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved up to the assembly trenches on the night of the 27<sup>th</sup>. It was during this operation that Walter's friend Harry Painter must have been killed, 'his friend [Walter] witnessing his death'; not a good omen.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary continues the tale: 'At 6.30am trench ladders and bridges were put in place and an intense Artillery barrage was opened. 7.30 was ZERO Time for Assault.

What the Diary doesn't make plain is the disaster of those 5 minutes before zero hour when the 8<sup>th</sup> left their trenches and crawled forward in readiness: many lost, the Commanding Officer dead, and all officers except 3 lieutenants out of action. They were followed by "A"Company, and "D" (Walter's Company), the latter weighed down with supplies – bombs, picks and shovels, trench stores. Heavy machine gun fire continued to mow them down, but they pressed on to the German trenches, 'battered out of all recognition, and only [consisting] of a mass of craters'. Eventually 2 groups, both under 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenants, managed to join up and held out in a trench all night, repulsing a bombing raid. By this time, half of them were dead.

Next morning reinforcements and more senior officers arrived; counter attacks were expected and prepared for; '[we] remained in the same position all day and throughout the night of the  $2^{nd'}$ .' Officer reinforcements arrived on the night of the  $2^{nd}/3^{rd}$ . Attacks and counter-attacks were planned or expected, but the Battalion remained in this position till relieved in the early hours of  $4^{th}$  July.

It seems remarkable that Walter managed to survive until the 3<sup>rd</sup>, when he was mortally wounded. These first days of the Somme were a disaster: enormous loss of life, and nothing substantial gained. He would have been picked up by stretcher bearers, taken to an Advanced Dressing station, then to a Field Ambulance, then the Casualty Clearing Station and finally evacuated back to England. Vera Brittain, writing in *Testament of Youth* of her days as a VAD, says 'At the end of June, the hospital received orders to clear out all convalescents and to prepare for a great rush of wounded. We knew that already a tremendous bombardment had begun, for we could feel the vibration of the guns in Camberwell....On...July 4<sup>th</sup> began the immense convoys which came without cessation for about a fortnight and continued at short intervals for the whole of that sultry month and the first part of August.'

Walter was taken to the Auxiliary Military Hospital, Tranmere (on the Wirral) but he didn't recover; 'he succumbed to his injuries on July 31<sup>st</sup>, Mrs Pring being with him to the last' *The Courier* says with sad restraint. His Death Certificate says he died of a gunshot wound to the shoulder, followed by secondary haemorrhage. (There is a death certificate because he died in this country.) He is buried

BUCKLAND ST. MARY. BUCKLAND LAD'S DEATH IN THE WAR .- Mr. and Mrs. George Pring have been the recipients of landly sympathy through the death of their son, Walter, aged 22 years. He and H. Painter joined up on May 29th, 1915, both going from the same farm in this parish, and great friends, and much respected in the district. Painter was not a native of this parish, but had resided here for several years. He was killed in action on June 26th, his friend witnessing his death. Pring himself was wounded on July 3rd, and was taken to Birkenhead Hospital, but he succumbed to his injuries on July 31st, Mrs. Pring being with him to the last.

at Bebington Cemetry on the Wirral, but with no individual headstone – there is a joint Memorial headstone to all those buried there.

Courier, 9 August 1916

A footnote to Walter's death: he had written a Will in the back of his Active Service Paybook, leaving everything to his mother; this was dated 9<sup>th</sup> October 1915, after his arrival in France. It seems certain that she never saw this, for it was filed away – mistakenly, one must presume – till re-discovered in 2013 with a large collection of other similar documents.



Bebington Cemetery, Wirral – joint headstone to W C Pring and fellow servicemen

# **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

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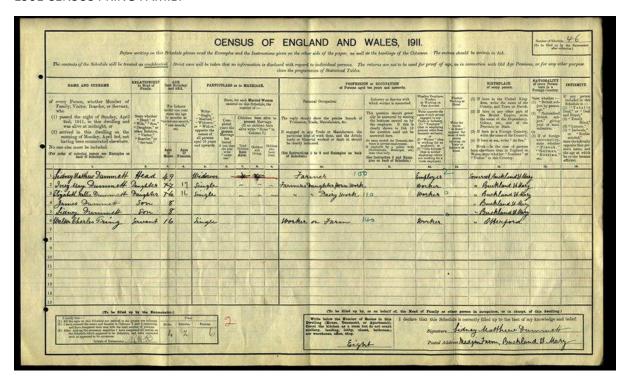
1881 CENSUS GEORGE PRING – FARM SERVANT

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1891 CENSUS GEORGE PRING

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## 1901 CENSUS PRING FAMILY



1911 CENSUS WALTER PRING AT MADGIN FARM, BSM

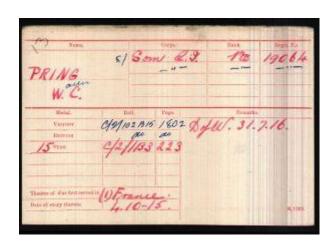
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1911 CENSUS PRING FAMILY, WITH WILLIAM, AT HORNSEY COTTAGE BSM

# OTTERFORD BOARD SCHOOL REGISTER – 1880-1907

Family	Child	Reg. No.	Date of Birth	Entered School	l Left	Parent	Parish
BUTTLE	Annie	93	b 14.3.81	ent 4.5.85	left 7.5.88	Samue	l Buttle BSM
	Annie	156		ent 11.1.92	left 28.3.92	Mary A	nn Buttle O
	Freder	ick 138	b 15.9.82	ent 31.3.90	left 8.3.94	SB	0
	Eva	139	b 15.9.84	ent 31.3.90	left 4.5.96	SB	0
	John	141	b 18.3.86	ent 5.5.90	left 2.10.96	SB	0
	Floren	ce 174	b 26.4.89	ent 11.5.92	left 14.9.03	SB	0
	Willian	n 233	b 2.12.91	ent 9.9.95	left 23.12.04	SB	0
	Samue	l 284	b 26.7.84	ent 29.8.98	left 27.7.07	SB	0
	Kate	316	b 11.5.97	ent 29.4.01	left DEAD	SB	0
BILLING	Fred	183	b 12.6.82	ent 8.5.93	left 17.12.94	John B	illing BSM

	Rosa 184	b 15.7.87	ent 9.5.93	left 28.10.01	JB	BSM
HARDWILL	James 348	b 2.4.92	ent 11.4.04	left 2.6.05	James	Hardwill BSM
	Martha 349	b 29.1.97	ent 11.4.04	left 13.5.10	JH BSM	1
PRING	Emma 247	b30.7.93	ent 31.8.96	left 30.7.93	George	Pring O
	Emma 275		ent 4.4.98	left 30.7.06	GP	0
	Walter 286	b 27.8.94	ent 29.8.98	left 27.8.07	GP	0
	Elsie 309	b 28.4.96	ent 9.7.00	left 15.3.04	GP	0
	William 325	b 31.7.97	ent 17.3.02	left 27.7.10	GP	0
	Bessie 346	b 8.9.93	ent 1.9.03	left 27.7.10	GP	0
	Samuel 358	b 15.6.01	ent 8.5.05	left 27.7.10	GP	0
	Annie 369	b 30.12.02	ent 4.7.06	left 27.7.10	GP	0
SMITH	Frank 362	b19.4.98	ent 9.10.15	left 13.4.11?	Frank S	mith O



MEDAL ROLL INDEX CARD – WALTER

# CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH



# GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number 5724209-1

REGISTR/	ATION DISTRICT			BIRKENHEAD			
1916 DEATH in	the Sub-district of T	ranmere	TERMINAN	in the Coun	ties of Birkenhead C.B., &	C	
Columns:- 1	2	3	4 5	6	7	8	9
No. When and where died	Name and surname	Sex A	ge Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
Historial Jales Jales 135 Augustung	Valter Ering,	male 2	offentake.  Bushland  Bushland  Tear Chard,	OSun Shot would of Shoulder OSecondary Hermorik	F 9 & Godfrey age atting Steward auxiliary military	Second august	S. W. Swan
Hospital, Francese	<b>d</b>	•	8th Somerests	G. S. Stansfield. m. R. E. S.	Transcre,	191 6	Registrar.

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the

13th

June

2014

DYD 708662

CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE ©CROWN COPYRIGHT

WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.

7264668 78631 10/13 3MTSSD 034484

INFORMAL WILL.

W.O. No.: E1236889/1

Record No. 186/350853/4

The enclosed document dated 9/10/1918

The military shares have been written and signed

Regtl. No. 19064 hwate appears to have been written or executed by the person Regt. I have been written be was "in actual military service" within the meaning bird at Bullwhead Accept in action.

But of Beath A July 1916 was been recognised by the Bate of Beath A July 1916

WAR OFFICE.

Date Secondar 1916

Nor the Assistant Floadial Secretary.

Date Secondar 1916

1/236889 P 1904 Ft W.B. Pring 8/ Son L

WILL.

In the event of my Death
I bequeath all my be
longings to may mother
Ohrs & Bring
Tamlake Bottage
Buckland Sk others
of a bhard
Somenet
Sined this date 9 [10], 918
Bry 116 W Bring

			Regiment,	Date		CREDIT	8			C	HARC		Date of Anthority	To whom Authorised	A	mount thorised	No. of List	Record 1
Record No.	Registry No.	Soldier's Name	Regiment, Rank, No.	Date and Place of Death	Account and Date	£	8.	d.	£	4.	đ.	Account and Date	Anthority	Authorised	Au £	thorised s. d	No. of List in which advertised	3 2
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1916.

Appendix.

## June. LA REUVILLE.

2nd The 8/Som.L.I. marched from LA WEUVILLE to VILLE where we were billeted for 10 days. During this period were employed on working parties.

#### VILLE.

- 11th The Battn went into the trenches, taking over left Sector of the Blat Divnl. front During this period our casualties were G.R. 1 killed, 4 wounded.
- The Battn was relieved by the loth Work & Lance & held the intermediary line for 5 days with Battn N.Q. at MEAULIE. A draft of 86 men arrived on 7.6.16. another of 55 men on the 19th. 2 Lt. R.H.G.BAILEY went to Field Ambulance on the 13th 2 Lt BARKER joined the Battn on the 17th 2 Lt. G.H.Simps rejoined from 63rd T.H.Battery on 19th.

### LA MEUVILLE.

- 20th The Battn marched to LA MEUVILLE short parades were held daily a the men
  were practised in "getting in a out of
  trenches" Bde sports were held on the
  afternoon of 24.6.16.
- 25th Capt. H.A. H. CAMPBELL joined from (lat
- 26th The Battn marched from LA MEUVILLE to

### VILLE.

27th The Battn marched from VILLE to the trenches & took ever the assembly STONRHAVEN ST.

### TRIDICHES.

- 28th In the evening we took over from the
  4th MIDDLESEX the attack having been
  put off 48 hrs we lost 1 cpl & 6 men
  in the relief. The bombardment of
  the encuy's positions commenced
  26.6.16. & kept up till 1 7.16.
- Reld front line The 4th Middlesex returned to their original position. We took over the new front line which had been tunnelled out & only just opened at the top. En. E.Q. moved up

1916.

June.

29th

(G'td.) was employed in removing our front line
wire & preparing for Assault.

July. At 6.30 A.m. Trench ladders & bridges were put in place and an intense Artillery barrage was opened.
7.30 Was ZERO Time for assault at-7

7.30 Was ZERO Time for assault at-7
A.M.
7.25 Front Wayes of B & C Coys crawled out.
A.M. The Bettalion was ordered to attack in
the following formation "B" & "C" Coys
in front "B" on right & "C" on left
were to advance in 4 lines of Platoons
at 2 paces interval, Supports about 100x
between lines - Supported by "A" Coy
in 2 lines of à Coys. "D" Coy coming
on in rear in Artillery formation e.g.
in lines of platoons in file as a
carrying party for B.A.A. Bombs - picks
& shovels - Trench stores etc.
Directly the Artillery barrage lifted
our men advanced in quick time. They
were mot by very heavy Enchine gum fire
and although officers & men were being
hit & falling everywhere the advance and although officers & men were being hit & falling everywhere the advance went steadily on, and was reported to by a Brigade Major who witnessed it to have been magnificent. The leading platons lost quite 50% going across "No Mans land" On arrival near the enemys front line they were momentarily held up by a Machine gun, but they as the successive supporting lines came up they soon got in. Already the enemy had opened an in. Already the enemy had opened an Artillery Barrage on "No Mans Land" & our front line trench - which caused heavy casualties among the supports. The only enemy found alive in his front line were a few machine gunners, who were immediately killed. Our men worked their way down the German communication Trenches Bombing dugouts which contained live germans, then on to where the trenches had been battered out of all recognition, and only consisted of a mass of craters. They were supported by one Stokes gun but the officer in charge & the team were soon knocked out; Then a Lewis Gun team of ours got up & lent considerable help; enabling our men to make a further advance. This party was under 2 Lt Kellett and party was under 2 Lt Kellett and
worked its way from crater to crater
until it got to LOZEMGE ALLEY which had
not been straffed by our Artillery, here
they consolidated - making fire steps
etc because it was only a communication
Trench. The enemy's barrage of shrapnel
prevented further advance. In
LOZEMGE ALLEY 2 Lt KELLETT'S party

1916.

July.

(G'ta)

joined up with 2 Lt A.H.HAIL's party ming a total of about 100. who had been doing such the same work. They held this position all night - during which time their repulsed a bembing attack coming from the direction of PRICOURT.

2nd 8.00 Cartn N.A.H. Campbell arrived with a

A.M. party of reinforcements carrying rations
he had previously found Lt. AKERMAN.
J.P. and about 30 men in BRANDY THERCH
whee-be-kad-fed and given them rations.
Major R.H. HUMTINGTON'S whereabouts were
located a his party was of
reinforcements carrying rations were
guided down to where-two-Batt
LOZENGE ALLEY. The following officers
joined with Maj Huntington:
2 Lt. S. Baker a 2 Lt. Mans. During
the morning a counter attack was
expected from FRICOURT and orders
were received to be prepared for an
attack from either direction we
arranged the trench accordingly and
remained in the same position all
might day and throughout the night of
the 2nd.

Night of 2/3 The following officer reinforcements arrived 2 Lt F.C. Adlam 2 Lt. G A.HAM and 2 Lt S.A.M. DOBSON. 2 Lt Adlam was ordered to take command of A.Coy. 2 Lt. S. Beker was ordered to take command of B.Coy. 2 Lt M Kellett was ordered to take command of C.Coy. 2 Lt G.A. Ham was ordered to take command of D.Coy. 2 Lt S.A.M. DOBSON was attached to D.Coy. 2 Lt. HALL acted as temporary Adjutant. 2 Lt. AKERMAN and his party were ordered to remain where they were in BRANDY TRENCH as there was no more room in LOZENGE ALLEY.

### LOZENGE ALLEY.

324

AboutDuring the morning of the 3rd an attack
9.0 was to be launched from CRUCIFIX TRENCH
a.m. on to the line SHELTER WOOD - BOTTOM
WOOD - and Captn. N.A. H. Campbell 2 Lt.
S. Baker and 2 Lt. G.A. Hem went to
reconneitre with a view to occupying
CRUCIFIX Trench in support of the attack
as soon as the attackers left it. The
Battn was not ordered to take up their
position. About 2 p.m. a senior officer
was sent for by Bde. N.Q. Captn Campbell
was sent, he was given instructions to

Appendix.

1916-	
July.	
14th	Battn was relieved in the trenches by the 9th Londons and marched back to RUMARRGARP. The 37th Div were today transferred to IV Corps.
15th	Batta marched to MOUVIN HOUVIGHBUL.
16th	Battn marched to VILLERS BRULIN.
isth	to GOUY SERVING.
24th	Major Muntington sick to he spital.
25th	Battn marched to CAMBLAIN L'ABBE. Working parties were provided for Berthonval.
26th	2nd Lieuts P.C. Hagon & T.C. Snow joined the Battn.
28th	Capt H. Hussey, 2nd Licuts L.S. Holmes, F.H.T. Joscelyne, E.A. Matthews, A. Garrard, W.R. B. Peel, P.S. Bryant, J.H.M. Hardyman, F.H. Baker, E.H. Horgan H.J. Fricker joined the battalion.
30th	Capt. S. Baker went sick
31 st	Battn. relieved 8th London Regt. in Berthonval I first line.

NEIL A. H. CAMPBELL, Major. Comdg. 8/Somerset L.I.