

Sergeant Edgar Winfield
Ewelme News, May 2002, August 2002

An old press cutting found in the Oxon Berks & Bucks Advertiser files dated 22nd February 1901 reported a Sergeant Winfield had died in South Africa whilst fighting in the Boer War. At the time the Sergeant's Christian name was not given.

The newspaper reproduced two letters sent to the widow following Sgt Winfield's burial at Standerton, South Africa in December 1900. Both are extremely moving tributes to the popularity of a son of Ewelme, who died so far from home and illustrating how sincerely Sgt Winfield was esteemed by his officers and men of his Regiment.

Standerton. South Africa
25th December 1900

Dear Mrs Winfield,

The N.C.O.'s and men of the left section, 86th Battery have asked me to send on to you the enclosed letter from them, which will express to you much better than anything I could say how sorry we all of us feel for you and your people at the death of your husband, and how deeply his loss will be felt by all ranks here.

Your late husband had endeared himself to everyone in this section by the prompt and willing way in which he always carried out his duty; and his readiness to help to teach those under him. It is a pity that, owing to the section being on their way in here from Waterval, so few men of the battery were present at the funeral, the arrangements for which were carried out by the 64th Battery, and I was very sorry not to be there myself.

I am afraid this will be a sad Christmas for you and many others at home and in this country. Your husband's grave is next to Bombardier Finch of this battery, who died two days ago.

*Believe me,
Yours sincerely
E. F.ST. John
86th Battery. R.F.A.*

The following is the letter from his comrades in arms.

Dear Madam,

Please allow me on behalf of the N.C.O's and men of the left section of the 86th Battery, R.F.A., to offer you our sympathy on your great bereavement in the loss of your husband, who I am sure must have been a good and kind husband, as he was liked very much by the Officers, N.C.O's and men. He was also a brave soldier and very calm and collected when our Section was under fire, and his loss is a great loss to yourself, his Queen, his country, and his comrades.

The 64th Battery found the firing party and four sergeants as pall bearers, amongst whom was one of his friends, Sergeant Roe. On account of our Section being at Waterval, I am sorry to say our officer as well as the majority of the men were unable to attend, but there was about 18 of his Section as followers, and myself in charge of the firing party.

We are going to have a cross erected, and if possible, a few photographs taken of it, which you will receive as soon as possible.

Once again, please accept our sympathy, and may the Lord bless you and your child in your bereavement and distress.

*Believe me to remain,
On behalf of the N.C.O's and men,
Sincerely yours, Sergeant R.O. Griffith
86th Battery, R.F.A*

P.S. – It may please you to know that Gunner Noteman brought [bought] your husband's spurs, and thought perhaps you would like them as a memento, so asks you please to accept them."

Apparently, it was customary for the belongings of a fallen comrade to be 'auctioned', so it seems that Gunner Noteman's fine gesture returned the spurs to Ewelme. How did the Sergeant die, in action, by accident or by disease? (During the Boer War over 10,000 British died of Enteric fever compared to 6,000 in combat!)

Sgt Winfield's identity discovered.

Requests for any information to confirm Sgt Winfield's identity threw up some answers from an unexpected source. We were contacted by Alastair Jack also from Benson. His hobby is Military History, and he has checked the Casualty List for the Boer War and confirmed that the soldier was Edgar Winfield. (Edgar John, son of Moses Winfield and brother of Sydney (of the Ewelme Dairy).

It is recorded that No. 3616 Sergeant Edgar Winfield of the 86th Battery, Royal Field Artillery died of disease (probably Typhoid) at Standerton, South Africa on December 17th 1900.

Being interested in Campaign Medals, Alastair checked the Medal Roll for the 86th Battery RFA and notes that Sgt Winfield's next of kin would have been issued with the Queen's South Africa medal with three campaign bars, Cape Colony, Transvaal and Laing's Nek. Those medals should have made their way back to Ewelme.

Alastair informed us that to find out more about the career of a member of the Armed Forces it would normally be possible to search the Army discharge papers at the Public Record Office at Kew, with certain exceptions. Regretfully Sgt. Winfield's papers are unlikely to be available as many documents were destroyed during various 'weeding out' processes carried out over the years. All Army service records relating to soldiers who were not 'discharged to pension' i.e. killed in action or died of disease, were destroyed and, he adds that there is probably only a 1 in 3 chance that papers of surviving soldiers being available!

Therefore, it is disappointing, but not surprising, that the Discharge Papers for Sgt Winfield are missing. But whilst investigating, Alastair did find references to two other Winfield soldiers from Ewelme. Thomas Winfield who joined the Hampshire Regiment (around 1900), his next of kin was his father, Samuel. Also, George Henry Winfield served between circa 1890 and 1900, his father was Silas [?] Winfield. George was in the 10th Hussars (Cavalry) for about 2 weeks before joining the Infantry of the Royal Berkshire Regiment. He was promoted to Corporal but unfortunately was then reduced to Private for 'breaking out of barracks.'



The Winfield Family outside their home Dormer Cottage. L to R. Eva, Beatrice, Helen, Moses, Daisy, Sydney, Edgar and Horace.

(Moses Winfield and his wife Ellen, who married on 26th November 1868. They had six children, Horace Stephen, Beatrice Ann, Edgar John, Eva Selina, Sydney White and Esther Sara. The Burial Register for St Mary's Church showed that Ellen died in 1891 aged only 51, but Moses lived on to the ripe old age of 88, dying in 1932. Beatrice Ann is recorded as dying in 1948 aged 75. Sydney died in 1960 and is remembered for starting the Ewelme Dairy.

Ewelme Village Archive