



## **Herbert Alfred Dancer**

### **1895 – 1915**

Herbert was born at 5, Briggs Row, Mortlake, Surrey on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1895. His father was William Henry Dancer, a Seaman born in Chelsea, London in 1844 and died in 1921. His mother was Emma (nee Tomkins) born in Hanworth, Middlesex in 1860 and died in 1935. They were married on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1887 at St. Mary the Virgin Church, Mortlake.

Their other children were; Annie Elizabeth Ellen, born in 1888 and died in 1888, William Henry, born in 1889 and died in 1889, Emily, born in 1890 and died in 1894, William Thomas Henry, born in 1892, Emma, born in 1897, Henry John, born in 1899 and died in 1900 and Ellen Elizabeth, born in 1901. On the 1911 Census they state that they had 10 children of which 6 were still alive; two names are recorded on the 1891 Census, Lily, born around 1884 and Joseph born around 1886. If these dates are correct, then these two were either born out of wedlock or William and Emma were previously married, but they are recorded as single on their marriage record in 1887. A birth was found for a Joseph Lesley Wilkinson Tomkins, born in 1884 but a connection has not been proved.

On the 1891 Census the family lived at 1, Back High Street, Mortlake, in 1901 at Briggs Row, Mortlake, in 1911 at Wick Road, Hampton Wick, Richmond, Surrey. Their post-war address was 17, Gomer Place, Teddington Middlesex.

Herbert was a single man who on the 1911 census is recorded as living as a servant with the Westerby family at Grange Moor. His occupation is given as Coal Trimmer.

He enlisted in Dewsbury serving as Private 12183 in the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and was sent to the Western Front on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1915. He was killed in action near Ypres on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1915. He was buried in Ypres Reservoir Middle Cemetery, but his grave was lost in later action and he is now commemorated by a Special Memorial Headstone in Ypres Reservoir Cemetery, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium. Herbert was awarded the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

From October 1914 to the autumn of 1918, Ypres (now Ieper) was at the centre of a salient held by Commonwealth (and for some months by French) forces. From April 1915, it was bombarded and destroyed more completely than any other town of its size on the Western Front, but even so certain buildings remained distinguishable. The ruins of the cathedral and the cloth hall stood together in the middle of the city, part of the infantry barracks stood in an angle of the south walls and the prison, reservoir and water tower were together at the western gate. Three cemeteries were made near the western gate: two between the prison and the reservoir, both now removed into the third, and the third on the north side of the prison. The third was called at first the "Cemetery North of the Prison," later "Ypres Reservoir North Cemetery, and now Ypres Reservoir Cemetery. This cemetery was begun in October 1915 and used by fighting units and field ambulances until after the Armistice, when it contained 1,099 graves. The cemetery was later enlarged when graves were brought in from the battlefields of the salient and smaller burial grounds, one of which was Ypres Reservoir Middle Cemetery, immediately North of the last named (also called "Prison Cemetery No.2" and "Middle Prison Cemetery"). It was used in August and September 1915, and rarely afterwards. It contained the graves of 107 soldiers from the United Kingdom (41 of whom belonged to the 6<sup>th</sup> King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry). There are now 2,613 Commonwealth servicemen of the First World War buried or commemorated in the cemetery. 1,034 of the burials are unidentified

Herbert is also commemorated on the Dewsbury Cenotaph in Crow Nest Park, in the Dewsbury Roll of Honour at Dewsbury Central Library and on the Memorial Pillar in SS. Mary and Michael Church, Whitley Lower.

Herbert's Commonwealth War Graves Commission record and his headstone originally gave his age as 16; when Dewsbury Sacrifices sent a copy of his birth certificate to the appropriate authorities, both his record and his headstone were amended.

In Memory of

Private

## Herbert Alfred Dancer

12183, 6th Bn., King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry who died on 20 September 1915 Age 20

Son of Mr. and Mrs. Emma Dancer, of 17, Gomer Place, Teddington, Middx.

Remembered with Honour

Ypres Reservoir Cemetery



Commemorated in perpetuity by  
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission



Headstone photograph by courtesy of Ms. Danielle Roubroeks, Antwerp, Belgium.