

16: John Thomas Crawley

Basic Information [as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC]

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: John Thomas Crawley

Rank: Private

Battalion / Regiment: 18th Bn. Welsh Regiment

Service Number: 290623

Date of Death: 23 November 1917

Age at Death: 32

Buried / Commemorated at: Cambrai Memorial, Louverval, Departement du Nord, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France

Additional information given by CWGC: Son of John Thomas and Margaret Crawley of Widnes, Lancs; husband of Catherine Phillips (formerly Crawley), of 25, Second Avenue, Llay, Wrexham, Denbighshire.

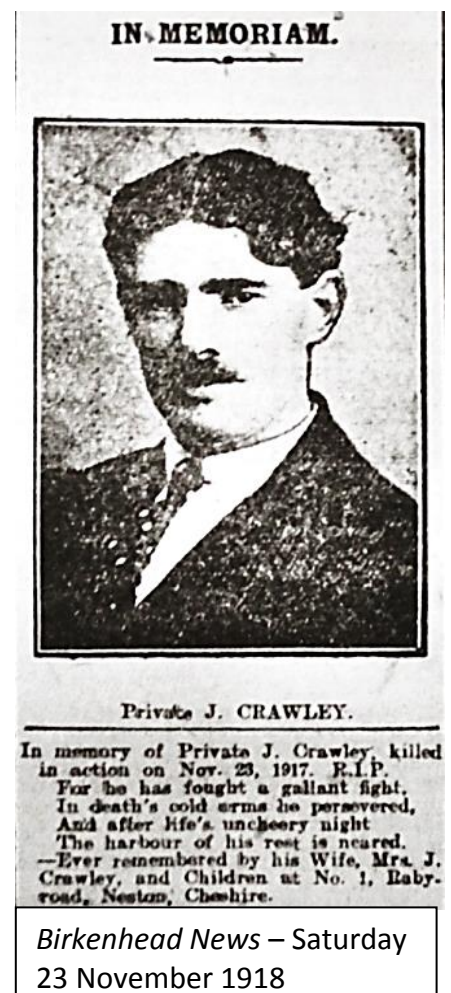
It has proved impossible to trace John Thomas Crawley with any certainty in census returns despite the fact that it is recorded that

- he was the son of John Thomas and Margaret Crawley of Widnes, Lancashire - although no record of his birth, or his parents' marriage, has been found.
- he was the husband of Catherine Phillips (formerly Crawley), of 25, Second Avenue, Llay, Wrexham, Denbighshire. John Thomas married Catherine Duddy in Leigh, Lancashire, in July / September 1903.
- he had at least five children, born in Wrexham and Neston, and possibly others born in Lancashire after their marriage.
- John and Catherine had a daughter, also Catherine, who was born 1 June 1916 and was baptised at St Winefride's RC church in Little Neston on 18 June.
- the family lived at 1, Raby Road, Neston but were not living there at the time of the 1911 census.
- John was living, and working, in Neston in the early years of the war and his widow and family were still in the town in November 1918.
- John '*...was employed by Mr Gates of Parkgate-road*' – this may, in fact have been Edwin Manning *Gater*, boot and clog maker and repairer.
- he was serving as a Private with the 18th Battalion Welsh Regiment when he died on 23 November 1918.

Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919 records that John was born in Widnes (although no record has been found) and enlisted in Birkenhead.

It appears that John and Catherine Crawley lived in the Wrexham area and that four children were born (or, at least, registered) there:

Gerard Joseph	born April / June 1910
Francis O.	born early 1912
Mary	born late 1913 died, aged 1, early 1915
Teresa	born April / June 1915

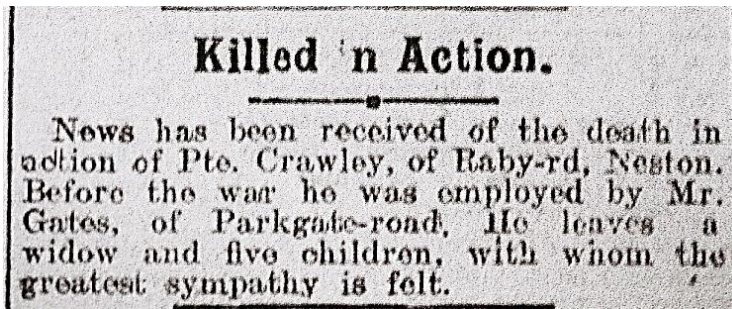




1, Raby Road, Neston (arrowed)

As Catherine Crawley was born in Neston in June 1916, and John died in November 1917, it appears that he did not live here for long. Following John's death, Catherine moved back to the Wrexham area and another child, named as Herbert Crawley, was registered there in early 1920 and died there, aged 1, in April / June 1921. Clearly, although the child was named Crawley, John Crawley cannot have been the father.

It is known that, following John's death his widow married Bertie K. Phillips in the Wrexham district in July / September 1921 (very shortly after the death of her child, Herbert) and that Bertie died, aged 57, in early 1947. No definite record of Catherine, John's widow, has been found after her marriage to Bertie.



Birkenhead News – Saturday 22 December 1917
There is some ambiguity in this brief report; although it states that there were five children, only four children are known

Unfortunately, John Crawley's Service Record has not been found and so we have no details of his army career or the circumstances of his death.

War Office Weekly Casualty List, 8 January 1918

WELSH REGIMENT.—Ackroyd 35808 D. L. (Morriston); Arnold 27759 L.-Cpl. C. (Macclesfield); Crawley 290623 J. T. (Neston);

Note: A search on findagrave.com leads to the wrong inscription.

The 18th (Service) Battalion (2nd Glamorgan) Welsh Regiment was formed at Cardiff in January 1915 as a Bantam Battalion. The battalion then moved to Porthcawl and was attached to the 43rd Division. In July 1915 they went on to Prees Heath in north Shropshire, close to the Welsh border, and in July they transferred to the 119th Brigade in the 40th Division before moving to Aldershot in September and were landed in France in early June 1916. In France the troops concentrated near Lillers, went into the front line near Loos and were later in action in The Battle of the Ancre on the Somme. In 1917 they saw action during the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line, the capture of Fifteen Ravine, Villers Plouich, Beaucamp and the Cambrai Operations, including the capture of Bourslon Wood which took place from 23 - 28 November – it was on the first day of this last operation that, almost certainly, John Thomas Crawley was killed.

The following, taken in full from 'The Long, Long Trail' gives some detail of the conflict in which John Thomas Crawley (in the 119th Brigade of the 40th Division) died:

When first presented with the Byng's plan for the attack, Douglas Haig recommended strengthening the left flank in order to take Bourslon Wood very early. He wasted his breath: Byng

ignored his advice. By nightfall on the 20th, it was clear that Haig had been right. From the dominating height of the wood, the Germans held the British advance in front of Anneux and Graincourt. There was good news, however, as the 51st (Highland) Division finally crept into Flesquieres, abandoned during the night by the Germans.

On the morning of the 21st, the Highlanders moved forward with the aid of two tanks towards Fontaine Notre Dame, but were held up by fire from the wood. Harper ordered a halt until the 62nd (2nd West Riding) Division had captured the heights. The latter had a violent and costly battle for Anneux, led by the 186th Brigade under Roland Boys Bradford. To the north, the 36th (Ulster) Division, planning to continue their advance beyond Moeuvres, waited for the success signal, signifying that the 62nd had captured Bourlon. It never came, for the 62nd could not penetrate beyond the sunken lane facing the wood. By the evening of the 21st, Haig was satisfied that 'no possibility any longer existed of enveloping Cambrai from the south'. The British were now in an exposed position in the lee of Bourlon Wood, the capture of which would still prove to be useful, in cutting German access to key light railway lines feeding their front. Haig and Byng decided to press on, even though it meant deepening the salient that had been created and throwing in even more troops into this northern sector of the battlefield.

On 22 November, the GOC 40th Division at Beaumetz-les-Cambrai received orders to relieve the 62nd Division the next day. The 40th was a division of Bantams, men under regulation height. By now the roads were breaking up under the strain of thousands of men, wagons and lorries. It took 40th Divisional HQ 15 hours to travel the 9 miles to Havrincourt. A relief and assault plan was quickly drawn up: 121 Brigade to capture Bourlon, 119 Brigade to go for the wood, both jumping off from the sunken lane. On their right, the 51st would move forward to Fontaine. On the left, the 36th would go in again at Moeuvres. 92 tanks would support these units. They attacked through ground mist on the morning of the 23rd. Some of the units of the 40th had to cross 1000 yards down the long slope from Anneux, across the sunken lane and up the final rise into the wood, all the while under shell fire. There was close and vicious fighting in the wood, but after 3 hours the Welsh units of 119 Brigade were through and occupying the northern and eastern ridges at the edge of the undergrowth. 121 Brigade was cut down by heavy machine gun fire, and few men got as far as the village. 7 tanks did but were unsupported and the survivors withdrew. On the flanks, the 36th and 51st Divisions made little progress, against strengthening opposition.

Over the next few days, further troops were thrown into the battle, including the Guards Division, which advanced into Fontaine. Once his troops had been driven from the wood, the enemy switched all of his artillery onto it. Battalions in the wood were wiped out. Three companies of the 14th HLI miraculously penetrated to the far side of Bourlon but were cut off and gradually annihilated. And it began to snow. The weary troops settled into the newly-won positions. The British now sat some way ahead of the position of 20th November, being in possession of a salient reaching towards Cambrai, with the left flank facing Bourlon and the right alongside the top of the slope which ran down towards Banteux. [<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/battles/battles-of-the-western-front-in-france-and-flanders/the-cambrai-operations-1917-battle-of-cambrai/>]



pierreswesternfront.punt.nl



Bourlon Wood in 1917

The War Diary of the 18th Battalion Welsh Regiment for 23 November 1917 gives more detail although John Crawley is not mentioned by name and, since it is not known to which Company he was attached, it is not possible to identify accurately his part in the action. A transcription of the pencil-written entry for this day is given below:

SPAINCOURT

23rd/11/17

At 10 AM the Attack was made on BOURLON WOOD by the 19th P.W.F. 412nd S.W.B. The 17th Welsh were in close support of the Cemetery. The 18th WELSH were in Brigade reserve. The Infantry was supported by 12 tanks.

At midday we received orders to move to ANNEUX CHAPELLE. B.P.R. being in a column. We arrived under heavy shell fire with a few casualties.

'B' & 'C' Boys were ordered at 3 pm. to clear the NORTHERN portion of BOURLON WOOD where the attack of the rest of the Brigade was held up.

WAR DIARY

or

INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.

(Erase heading not required.)

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs., Part II, and the Staff Manual respectively. Title pages will be prepared in manuscript.

Army Form C. 2118.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
	23/11/17		<p>'D' Boys were ordered to make their way up the left or East side of the wood and captured the High Ground N.W. corner of the WOOD overlooking the village of BOURLON together with 135 prisoners. They placed themselves in touch with the 1st Brigade on the left and dug a strong point which they held through the day. Three days we were in the wood.</p> <p>'B' and 'C' Companies made their way up the central side and attacked the ridge on the N.W. corner of the wood. Their attack was made from the junction of cross roads in the centre of the wood. They came under heavy G. fire and lost many killed and wounded.</p> <p>Lieut. Col. W. F. NEDDY seeing that 'C' Company were being hard pressed by Machine Gun fire. The Company was forced back some 30 yards and as further progress was impossible the line was consolidated for the night.</p> <p>'B' Company fought on the right of 'C' Company. Captain J. P. Jones was wounded in the first attack.</p> <p>A Company were at half strength having provided a company party of 60 for the 119th Brigade M.G. Company. They were kept in reserve during the day but were</p>	

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Army Form C. 2118.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
			<p>sent up during the night to reinforce against a strong counter attack which was expected at day break.</p> <p>Major C. C. Dowling was wounded at 4 pm. in the afternoon. During the night a trench line was dug and supplies of ammunition water ration were taken up to the front line.</p> <p>Eleven P.R.s returned from leave to the Detach.</p> <p>Support Two Companies of the Anglin & Southland Highlanders and two troops of the 1st Cavalry were moved into the wood.</p> <p>Captain J. M. Mathews was put in charge of the Battle under direction of Lieut. Col. R. Benge.</p>	

Transcription of the War Diary of the 18th Battalion Welsh Regiment for 23 November 1917.

GRAINCOURT 23/11/17

At 10am the attack was made on BOURLON WOOD by the 19th RWF and 12th SWB. The 17th Welsh were in close support at the Cemetery. The 18th Welsh were in Brigade reserve. The Infantry was supported by 12 tanks.

At midday we received orders to move to ANNEUX CHAPELLE, BHQ being in a cellar. We arrived under heavy shell fire with a few casualties.

'B' and 'C' Coys. were ordered at 3pm to clear the NORTHERN portion of BOURLON WOOD where the attack of the rest of the Brigade was held up.

'D' Coy. were ordered to make their way up the left or EAST side of the wood and captured the High Ground N.W. corner of the WOOD overlooking the village of BOURLON together with 135 prisoners. The(y) placed themselves in touch with the 121 Brigade on the left and dug a strong point which they held throughout the three days we were in the wood.

'C' and 'B' Companies [word unclear] which made their way up the central side and attacked the ridge on the N.W. corner of the wood. This attack was made from the junction of cross roads in the centre of the wood. They came under heavy M.G. fire and lost many killed and wounded.

Lieut. Col. W. KENNEDY seeing that 'C' Company were being hard pressed went to them and placed himself near Capt. E.W. EDWARDS. Both were killed by machine gun fire. The Company was forced back some 60 yards and as further progress was impossible the line was consolidated for the night.

'B' Company fought on the right of 'C' Company. Captain J.E. Jones was wounded in the first attack.

'A' Company were at half strength having provided a carrying party of 64 OR for the 119th Brigade M.G. Company. They were kept in reserve during the day but were sent up during the night to reinforce against a strong counter attack which was expected at daybreak.

Major C.C. Dowding was wounded at 4pm in the afternoon. During the night a trench line was dug and supplies of ammunition, water, rations was taken up to the front line.

Eleven ORs returned from leave to the Detach.

Two Companies of the Argyll & Southerland Highlanders and two troops of dismounted Cavalry were moved into the wood.

Captain F.M. Martin was put in charge of the Battn. under direction of Lieut. Col. R. Benfie.

Abbreviations: RWF - Royal Welsh Fusiliers SWB - South Wales Borderers
BHQ - Battalion Head Quarters M.G. - machine gun
OR - Other Ranks (all ranks, including non-commissioned officers, below officer-rank)

John Thomas Crawley is commemorated on the Cambrai Memorial to the Missing which indicates that his body was unrecovered or that his grave is unknown.

The Medal Rolls Index Card has the remark Returned (1743KR) 8142/Adt.

Whilst the precise meaning of this comment appears now to be lost it probably suggests that the medals were returned, either because they were sent to the incorrect address, or the family had moved, or because they could not be delivered, or because the inscriptions were incorrect.

Medals which were not claimed after 10 years were broken up.

Name	Corps	Rank	Regtl. No.
CRAWLEY.	Welsh R.	Pte.	290625
John. T.			
Medal	Roll	Page	Remarks
VICTORY	9/1/104 B34	12944	Returned (1743 KR) 8142/Adt.
BRITISH	do	do	
STAR			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

8142/Adt K. 1380

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920

