

ST JAMES CHURCH TAUNTON
WORLD WAR 1 MEMORIAL PROJECT

Bertie Poole

Name: Bertie Poole

Rank: Sapper

Service Number: 71145 WR/143087

Regiment: Royal Field Artillery / Railway Troops, Royal Engineers

Battalion/Unit number:

Date/year of Birth: 13th July 1893

Place of Birth: Taunton

Place of Residence: 14 Tancred Street, Taunton

Date of Death: 7th January 1919

Place of Death: Egypt

Burial/Memorial: Kantara War Memorial Cemetery

Bertie Poole was the youngest child of William and Mary Ann Poole. William is described in the 1911 census as a Fish dealer and lived in Tancred Street. Bertie had four brothers William, Frederick, Henry, and Albert and three sisters Selina, Elizabeth and Edith. By 1911 only Bertie and Emma were living at home. He was then employed as an Engine Cleaner with the Great Western Railway Company. The records of the WSR add a little more information indicating that he was an engine cleaner from 13th October 1910 to 1911, (earning 2 shillings a week (10p) and then graduated to 3rd Fireman on 6th December 1911 at a different station. His eyesight was good and although he failed an initial medical he passed it in 1911. However on 13th September he resigned to help his father in his business.

Army service records reveal that Bertie had been in the Somerset Light Infantry Territorials before the war in 1912 to 1913, as a driver, however he was "discharged free". This was a year after he resigned from the Railway so may have been connected with his need to support his father in his business. He was not eligible on his medal record for the 1914/15 star so would have re-enlisted after 1915. This is borne out by the records which indicate he was posted to the Royal Field Artillery on the 16th October 1917 as a driver.

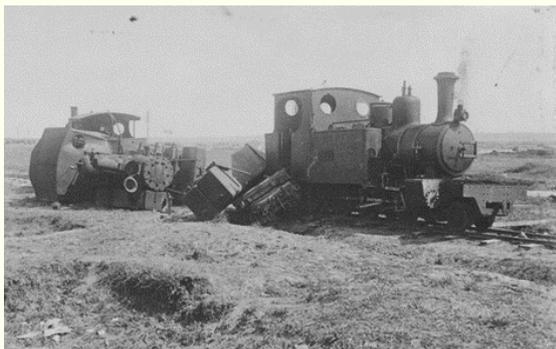
In November 1917 he was posted with the 90th Brigade as part of the Expeditionary Force to Mesopotamia at Nowshera. On November 20th he was at Mankira suffering from malaria and was admitted to the field hospital from 20th November to 8th December. In February 1918 he joined the 374th battery Royal Field Artillery at Basra. He was at Basra in April 1918 and from there moved to Suez. On 13th July he was compulsorily transferred to the Railway Operating Division of the Royal Engineers and supplied with a new Service number. By October he was in Alexandria.

Unfortunately Bertie was again taken ill in December 1918, after the war ended, and was admitted to hospital in Alexandria where he died on 7th January 1919. The note from the medical officer reads: "Sapper Poole was admitted to the 24th St IP on the 4.1.19 suffering from influenza and bronchial pneumonia. He was placed on the dangerously ill list and since died 7.1.1919. His death was due to disease contracted while serving in the army and aggravated by military service".

His effects were passed to his family later in the year and included a cigarette lighter, cigarette case, letters, photos, cards, mirror, notebook, belt and coin.

Note on the Railway Troops

The contribution to the war effort, especially on the Western Front, of the designated Railway Troops of the Royal Engineers is largely overlooked and not researched in many accounts of the conflict. Given the fact that the earliest troop movements gave rise to the phrase "war by timetable" and that the railway was the primary means of movement of men, munitions and supplies, the important if unglamorous role of this military function cannot be underestimated. The Railway troops were divided into three groups those involved in Construction, Operation and Maintenance. As part of the ROD, Bertie would have been involved in operating the trains. Like Bertie, many of the troops and officers had worked for the railways in the UK and colonies in civilian life.



Note on Kantara Cemetery

In the early part of the First World War, Kantara was an important point in the defence of Suez against Turkish attacks and marked the starting point of the new railway east towards Sinai and Palestine, begun in January 1916. Kantara developed into a major base and hospital centre and the cemetery was begun in February 1916 for burials from the various hospitals, continuing in use until late 1920. After the Armistice, the cemetery was more than doubled in size when graves were brought in from other cemeteries and desert battlefields, notably those at Rumani, Qatia, El Arish and Rafa.