

Private 240770 John Nicholls (Jack)

Groom of School Street, St Tudy

1st Battalion Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry

Born 11th January 1893

Killed in Action 4 October 1917 aged 25

John (or Jack, as he is known in the 1901 census) was born in School Street, Churchtown, the fourth child of Harry and Anna Lena Augusta Nicholls (nee Richards). They lived next door to Gordon Burden and his parents. His father, Harry, was born in St. Tudy and worked as a servant, then a shoemaker, general farm labourer and then a groom. John's mother, Anna Lena Augusta (nee Richards), who also called herself Bessie, was born in Delabole. The Nicholls family has been in St. Tudy since the 1500's, although John (Jack) may not be a direct descendant of the original family. He had three older siblings Lena born in 1887, Harry (1889), and Alice (1891). His younger brother James was born in 1896 followed by Frederick (1898), Charles or Charlie (1901), William (1903) and Norman (1906). They all attended St Tudy School and Frederick was a newsboy in the village, either selling papers from a stand or delivering around the village.

John and James followed in their father's footsteps and John became a groom and James a farm labourer, probably all working on the same farm together. In 1881, John's father, Harry, working on the Stephen's farm at Tregaddock which was 450 acres at that time. Harry's mother was Amelia Stephens, so there is a family connection. Harry's father, John's grandfather, Thomas, also worked as a farm labourer.

The date of John's enlistment in Bodmin is unknown, records having been destroyed. He was assigned to the 1st Battalion of DCLI which fought at the Western Front from 1914 to 1917 and then moved to Italy in 1918.

John's final hours on 4th October 1917 were spent during a fierce 13-hour day of fighting for the Cornwalls, with the Devons at their side at the Battle of Broodseinde.

He is buried at the Hooge Crater Cemetery, not far away. Hooge is a small village on the Menin Road around two miles from Ypres.

His brothers all survived, but his nephew Ernest James Nicholls, (son of James), died in World War 2 and is also commemorated on the village War Memorial.

Private John Nicholls

Brief extract from the Brigade Diary* 3rd-5th October 1917:

“At 5.30 a.m. the Bosche put down a heavy barrage on our back areas, and on the assembly positions. At 6.00 a.m. our barrage opened” and the narrative states that “hostile barrage appeared feeble by comparison.

At zero hour, the assaulting waves went over in perfect formation.

Almost immediately the western edges of Cameron Covert and the “pill boxes” burst into a sheet of flame.

From Polderhoek Chateau and Park, running on the right of the Cornwalls, heavy machine gun fire swept the line of advance. For a short while the advance was checked, but soon the attackers were again advancing, though touch with the barrage had been lost.

From 7.30 a.m. onwards the enemy’s barrage increased in intensity. Battalion Headquarters could get no news from companies, for most of the officers had become casualties, and runners sent back with messages were either killed or wounded by machine-gun and shell fire.

For thirteen hours this savage hail of shell continued, and then between 6 and 7.30 p.m. it slackened.”

So, as you can see, from this excerpt, John was one of many Cornwalls lost on that day,. He was 25 years of age.

Polderhoek Chateau, where the fighting took place, before the war, was a beautiful chateau with wonderful ornamental laid out gardens. On the day John died, it was like the surface of the moon.