

Wilfred Harry Merefield 1882-1917

by Richard Merefield



Wilfred Harry Merefield was my paternal grandfather.

He was born in Compton Abbas Dorset in the second quarter of 1882 to James and Amelia Merefield, the youngest of 10 children. The 1891 census records the family living in Hawksham Lane, Compton Abbas. Wilfred was working a coal miner in Wales, lodging with brother Albert, by 1901.

Three years later, my Grandfather had returned to his native Dorset and married Louisa Gertrude Woodrow on 18 January 1904 at the parish church of St James in Shaftesbury. Wilfred was 22, a Platelayer of Semley, son of James Merefield, Farmer; Louisa age 20, spinster, daughter of Herbert Woodrow, Cabinet Maker.

Between 1904 and the start of the Great War, Wilfred and Louisa had three children, Lillian C (b.1906), Herbert James (b.1909) and Wilfred Charles (b.1911). Two more would follow, Sidney J in 1915 and Wilfreda May in October 1917, two months after her father died.

Wilfred enlisted in Devizes, becoming 58573 Gunner Merefield, 82 Brigade, Royal Field Artillery. In the absence of his Service Record, it is possible to estimate his enlistment date, from the amount of war gratuity paid to his wife after his death, as December 1914.

82nd Brigade was part of the 18th (Eastern) Division. Between 31st July and 2nd August 1917 the Division took part in the Battle of Pilkem, a phase of the Third Battle of Ypres. Wilfred died when a shell exploded next to him and his Sergeant on 1st August 1917. He had only recently returned from leave and had been posted to "C" Battery, 82nd Brigade Royal Field Artillery.

Wilfred's Commanding Officer wrote to my Grandmother:

British Expeditionary Force

Dear Madam,

It is with deepest regret that I have to inform you of the Death in Action of your Husband (Gunner W Merefield No. 57938) on August 1st 1917, from Shell fire, death being instantaneous.

He had only been with us about two days and while helping his Sergeant to erect a bivouac a Shell fell close by and killed them both. His body was brought down from the line and was laid to rest yesterday in a Cemetery close by the Wagon Line, and I am arranging for a Cross to be erected to his memory.

Both I and all here in his Battery send you our deepest sympathy, which is greater because he had been with us such a short time.

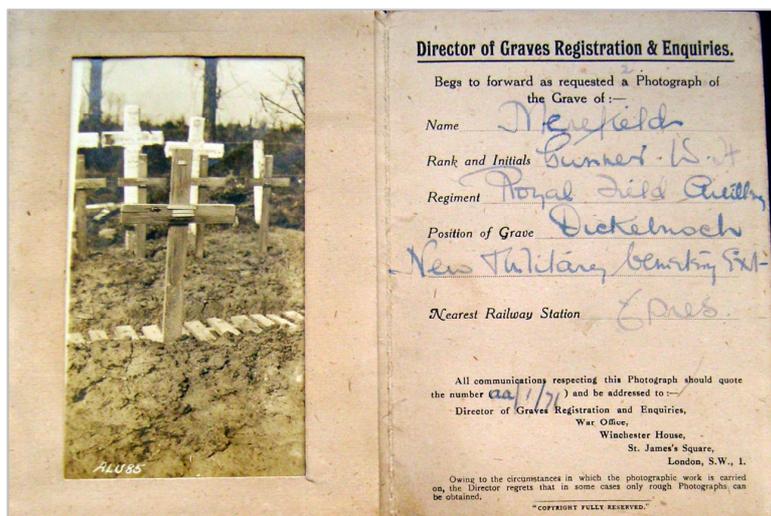
The few personal belongings which he had will be sent to you in the course of a few days. I have not been able to find his Pay Book up to the present.

I am so sorry for you in your great loss, and I want you to feel that he has been killed while serving in a good cause and that you have from us all our sincerest sympathy.

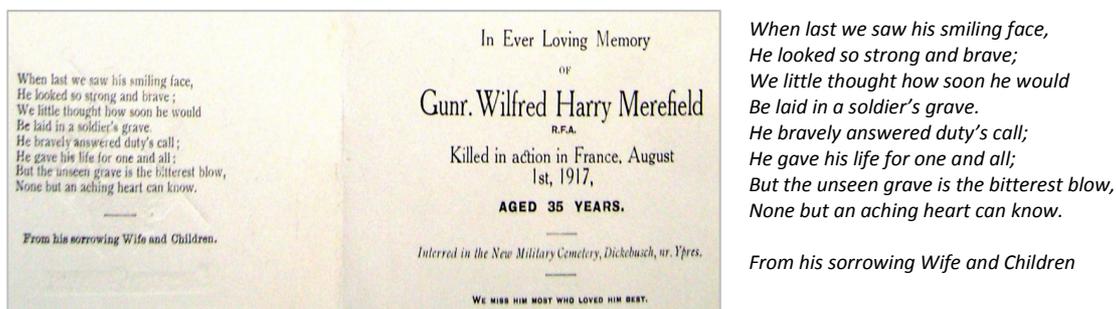
Yours truly,
J.R. DRINKWATER, LIEUT
C/82 B de R.R.A.

82/ Bde R.F.A.	22971/MILLER ✓	Sgt T.	1.8.17.	15 JUN 1921	13.
do	58573/MEREFIELD ✓	Gnr W.	do		14.

Extract from the Grave Registration Report Form shows Gnr W Merefield was laid to rest beside Sgt T Miller, of the same unit who died on the same day. Undoubtedly this was the Sergeant mentioned in the Commanding Officer's letter when he and my Grandfather were hit by shell fire. (Note: Wilfred's regimental number is incorrect here, it should read 57938).



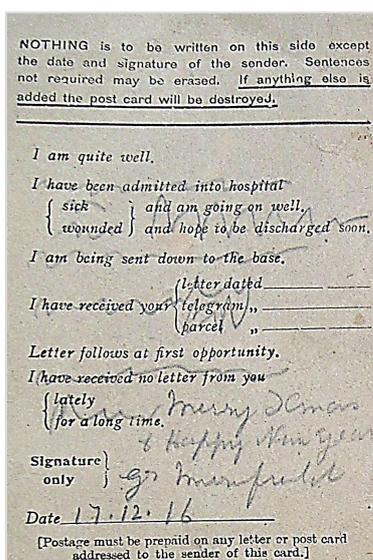
My Grandmother chose for her husband's headstone the inscription "Peace Perfect Peace." The verse on Wilfred's memorial card below conveys how sad Louisa was at not being able to visit his grave.



When I visited my Grandfather's grave in the mid 1980's, I couldn't help but feel that the village and football ground were so similar to those in North Dorset around the area where he lived.



1915. Wilfred H Merefield with wife Louisa, children left to right Wilfred Charles, Lilian, baby Sidney and eldest son James



1916. Post card from my Grandfather, sent shortly before Xmas

In Memory of

Gunner

Wilfred Harry Merefield

57938, "C" Bty. 82nd Bde., Royal Field Artillery who died on 01 August 1917 Age 35

Husband of Louisa Gertrude Merefield, of 229, Gutch Common, Semley, Wilts.

Remembered with Honour

Dickebusch New Military Cemetery Extension



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Dickebusch New Military Cemetery Extension contains 547 First World War burials, including 5 unidentified.
The site was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens.