

Samuel Higgins 1894-1917

Acting Corporal Samuel Higgins, (20914) of the 1st Battalion, Devonshire Regiment, was born in Lifton in Spring 1894 and enlisted in Tavistock.

He was killed in action in France on 23 April 1917 aged 22 and is buried in La Chaudiere Military Cemetery, Vimy France

He was the son of Samuel and Annie (Westlake) Higgins and in 1911 he had been a waggoner on Solomon Bickell's farm, Westcott near Lewdown.

Samuel Higgins was born in the Spring of 1894 in Tavistock, the son of Samuel and Ann or Annie Higgins nee Westlake. Samuel was born in Lifton in 1866, Ann in Lidford in 1869. They married in 1890. They started their married life in Lifton, living with Samuel's widowed father, Thomas. At that time, 1891, Thomas was 71 and a Lime Quarrier. Samuel was an Agricultural Labourer aged 25 and Annie was 22. Also living in the household was Thomas' grand daughter, Elizabeth Ann aged 21, the daughter of his daughter, Elizabeth.

The richness of Thomas Higgins' accent is reflected in the 1861 Census where he is recorded as Thomas Eggins.

By 1901 the family was living in Whitchurch, Samuel, then 34, was a Railway packer for the GWR, Ann was 31 and they had four children, Thomas (10), **Samuel** (7), Elsie (5) and John Henry (2).

In 1911 **Samuel** was 17 and working away from home as a waggoner on the farm belonging to Solomon Bickle at West Cottage near Lewdown in the parish of Milton Abbott. His family was living in Stowford Hill, Lewdown. Samuel was a Quarryman aged 46. His wife of 19 years was named as Ann Jackman Higgins. Their children were Elsie (14), John Henry (12) and James William (10), all born in Whitchurch. Research indicates that the Higgins family moved to Stowford Hill in about 1910 and members of the family continued to live there until James' son Ron (b1924) sold it in 2003, having lived there all his life. Stowford Hill had originally been the Parish Poor House before becoming a private dwelling.

Few facts remain of Samuel's army service, but he enlisted at Lewdown and was possibly posted to the 8th Battalion the Devonshire Regiment, then serving in France, as a replacement, certainly not before 1916. At some point he appears to have joined 1st Battalion, the Devons, possibly after a spell away from the front because of injury or illness. In April 1917 the largely Canadian force won a famous victory when taking Vimy Ridge. 1 Devons were holding part of the line although not part of that action.

On 23rd April 1917 1 Devons, along with the D.C.L.I. and other units were ordered to lead a subsidiary action near Arras between the Vimy – Lens railway line and the Souchez river. It was soon obvious that the Germans were well dug in and the attackers were met by a hail of rifle and machine gun fire. It was virtually impossible to cross the 600 yards of no-man's-land. Samuel as an Acting Corporal would have been in the forefront of the attack. Aged 22, he was posted as missing, presumed dead. Over 70 men from the battalion were either killed or missing and 245 were wounded on that day.

His body must have been found subsequently because he was buried at the small La Claudiere Military Cemetery which had been designed by Sir Herbert Baker, at the foot of Vimy Ridge along with 4 more of his regiment. It remained very small until the summer of 1919, when graves were brought in from many other small cemeteries and isolated sites (some of these from the 1916 fighting) on or near the ridge. At this time, the cemetery was known as Vimy Canadian Cemetery

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No.1. There are now 907 servicemen of the First World War buried or commemorated in this cemetery. 314 of the burials are unidentified but there are special memorials to a number of casualties known to have been buried among them. Other special memorials commemorate men whose graves in some of the concentrated cemeteries had been destroyed in subsequent fighting.

Samuel's overseas service qualified him for the British War and Victory medals which his father received along with £10 10s 8d War Gratuity and back pay.

HIGGINS

Thomas m Ann
b1820 b1823

