

PRIVATE NELSON ROWBERRY

Service Number: 19944

Regiment & Unit/Ship: Worcestershire Regiment (3rd Battalion)

Date of Death
Died 24 May 1916
Age 21 years old

Buried or commemorated at
AUBIGNY COMMUNAL CEMETERY EXTENSION
Plot Number I. C. 31.
France

**Grandson of Ann Rowbery, of Dinthill Cottage, Boraston, Tenbury
Wells, Worcestershire.**



Private Nelson Holyroyd Rowberry was 21 when he died of wounds at Aubigny on the Western Front on May 24th 1916. He was caught up in a German attack on Vimy Ridge to the north of Arras, which began on May 21st and ended 3 days later on the 24th. It was a short local action which should not be confused with the Battle of Vimy Ridge, which was fought over the same ground in 1917.

(Several spellings of Nelson's surname exist in the public record. We have "Rowberry" with two r's on our parish War Memorial – which is the one I've gone with - as well as "Rowbery" with one r in the Commonwealth War Graves records and "Rubery" on his Western Front burial record. All three spellings appear in various UK Census and Rowberry family Birth, Marriage and Death records).

Birth, early life and family background

Nelson Rowberry was the only son of Louisa Rowberry. He was born at Leominster in the first quarter of 1896 and spent his early years living at Dinthill Farm, Boraston with his grandparents, Thomas and Ann Rowberry. His family tree took a bit of untangling because he is described on the 1901 Census as their son - but from looking at his WW1 pension records, it is clear he was actually their grandson, born out of wedlock to their second daughter Louisa.

Nelson's grandfather, Thomas Rowberry, was born at Bishops Frome in Herefordshire in October 1840 and spent most of his life working as a carter or an agricultural labourer, moving wherever the work took him. His grandmother Ann Rowberry (nee Gittins) was born at Brimfield in 1845. Between the late 1860s and the 1890s Thomas and Ann lived with their growing family at cottages at Kimbolton and at Bickley, moving to Dinthill Farm before 1901. They had 9 children altogether, with 5 surviving into adulthood:- Harriet, Louisa, Thomas Henry, Frederick William and Amy. Thomas must have been a decent, trustworthy man because by the time of the 1901 Census, he was over 60 years old and had worked his way up to the well-paid position of farm bailiff at Dinthill Farm.

Nelson's mother, Louisa Rowberry, was Thomas and Ann's second surviving daughter. She was born in 1873 when the family was living at Kimbolton near Leominster. When Nelson was 3 years old, Louisa married 22 year old Thomas Poulton from Leominster at Boraston Church on May 29th 1899. She was probably already pregnant with their daughter, Doris May Poulton, who was born later that year.

Although the identity of Nelson's father is not known, I considered the possibility that he might also be Thomas Poulton's child - which is unlikely, because his surname remained as Rowberry. There may be some clues in his first names –

and I'm flying kites here! Nelson may indicate a naval connection and his second name, Holroyd, might be the surname of one of the families Louisa worked for. Louisa and Thomas Poulton's happiness was short lived because Louisa died only 15 months after they were married. She was only 26 years old when she was laid to rest in Boraston churchyard on September 2nd 1900, leaving behind 2 small children.

It is not clear whether Thomas Poulton took any further part in the childrens' upbringing. When the Census was taken in April 1901, he was living as a boarder at the Coffee Tavern in West Street, Leominster and working as a well sinker while Nelson and his baby half-sister, Doris, were living at Dinthill Farm with their grandparents and their 14 year old aunt, Amy. (Nelson Rowberry is listed on the 1901 Census as Thomas and Ann's son, and 1 year old Doris Poulton is listed as a "relative"). By this time their mother had been dead for 8 months and the family were probably still working out what to do next – so it is possible that Nelson's grandparents made a conscious decision to bring him up as their own child.

When the next Census was taken in 1911, Nelson Rowberry was 15. He had left home but was still living locally with the Good family at Aston Court, Knighton on Teme, where he was working as a farm labourer. His grandparents were still at Dinthill Farm with his 11 year old half sister, Doris Poulton. Nelson's uncle, Thomas Henry Rowberry, was also working for the Good family at Aston Court and living with his wife and children in a cottage called Lower House, one of the other buildings in the farm complex there.

Military Service

Nelson Rowberry's army service record is unfortunately one of the 50% that were destroyed when a German bomb struck the War Office repository in September 1940, so we don't know when and where he enlisted. We do know that he volunteered because he was already in France when conscription was first introduced in January 1916.

Nelson was only a year older than another of our parish fallen, Percy Henry Howells, who lived at the house now called Ramblers Way in Boraston village. The two boys would have both attended school at Nash, and they both served with the Worcestershire Regiment - Nelson with the 3rd Battalion and Percy with the 1st - so it is possible they enlisted together.

The Worcestershire Regiment came into being in 1881 following the Childers Reforms, a comprehensive restructuring of all the infantry regiments in the British Army. It comprised of 4 battalions:- the 1st and 2nd were created from the 29th Regiment of Foot and the 36th (Herefordshire) Regiment; all seasoned

soldiers who served overseas. The 3rd and 4th were originally two battalions of County Militia. They were based locally here in the UK, and their main purpose was to train new recruits and maintain public order. The Regiment expanded to 8 battalions in 1900 during the Boer War, with another 14 added at the start of the First World War.

The 3rd Battalion in which Nelson Rowberry served was part of the 7th Brigade, which went out to France on August 14th 1914 and took part in most of the early battles including Mons, Le Cateau, the Marne and the First Battle of Ypres. Training for new recruits typically took 6-12 months, so he was probably allocated to it in 1915 in a replacement for men who fell in these early battles. On October 18th 1915 the whole 7th Brigade transferred to the 25th Division and remained in the Pas du Calais region near the modern border between France and Belgium.

The 3rd Worcestershire was one of several British units that replaced French forces on the west side of Vimy Ridge in March 1916. Its role was to protect Allied sappers who were digging mines under the top of the ridge towards German trenches on the far side. On May 21st 1916 the German Army launched a surprise attack to gain control of the British mine galleries and prevent the mines from being blown up under their own positions.

According to Wikipedia, the Germans “were able to consolidate their objectives before the British could conduct counter attacks powerful enough to recapture the ground”. The British plan to recapture the lost trenches was cancelled days after Nelson Rowberry lost his life because resources were being diverted to the Somme. This short 4-day action became known as the Defence of Vimy Ridge. It resulted in 1,344 German and 2,475 British casualties (of which he was one). What a cruel waste of young lives!

To give you a flavour of what the fighting was like, I’d like to share an abridged account by Lance Serjeant Frank Wilfrid Watts, who served with the 15th Battalion, London Regiment, one of the other British units involved in the Defence of Vimy Ridge. In this extract he talks about his experience of a failed night-time counter attack at the end of the first day on May 21st 1916:- “Somehow the company got across the valley at last and found itself lined up under a rise which led away up into the darkness. Here we halted again, while the Company Commander went into a small hut made of sandbags, which served, I suppose, as the headquarters of the battalion in the line.

Shells thudded down and burst on the slope in front of us or shrieked over our heads. Presently word was passed along that every man was to take two bandoliers of ammunition in addition to the 120 rounds that were always carried. Boxes of ammunition appeared from somewhere and were opened; we

each took a couple of bandoliers and hung the things round our necks. When all had been served, word came along to fix bayonets. We fixed.

Then the order "Advance!" These orders were, of course, passed down from man to man in the good old Army fashion; we did not know from whom they came"

"Opening out as we moved up the slope, we came to a trench, which I knew later was the British front line; to us it was simply an obstacle to be jumped into and scrambled out of in the dark.

By this time we had come under machine gun fire; the night seemed alive with bullets, whose crack, crack was almost deafening. As I got out of the trench I saw, by the light of a flare, our platoon- sergeant cursing some men who wanted to stop in it. He was threatening them with his bayonet and shouting, "Get out, you b-- s!"

In front of the trench the attacking party seemed to melt away, and I soon began to feel rather lost, and strongly disinclined to go any further. I dropped into a shell hole with a half-hearted suggestion to myself that I only wanted to take stock of things for a minute. Another man got down into it at the same time who turned out to be my best chum. We exchanged some sort of greeting, and I soon discovered that he had no more desire to leave the hole than I had, which was some comfort for my conscience.

We crouched against the forward lip. Another minute or so, and the night seemed to turn red. Looking up, I saw almost over our heads a rocket which had burst into three red lights. I knew what that meant. It was the German S.O.S. signal to the artillery at that period.

I said "Good God! we're for it now!" The barrage came down on us. This time the shells were not going over, but coming close to us, and their shrieks rose to an almost unbearable pitch before they burst. Around us the world seemed to be shattered by explosion after explosion; the hellish crack of bullets went on unabated, and in front the lights danced continually up and down".

Nelson Rowberry died of wounds only 3 days later, on May 24th 1916, and he is buried in Plot I, Row C Grave 31 in Aubigny Communal Cemetery Extension alongside comrades from the 3rd Battalion Worcestershire regiment and other soldiers from the 10th Cheshires, the 7th London, the 15th Royal Warwickshire and the 1st Royal Berkshire who also fell in the Defence of Vimy Ridge.

According to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the village of Aubigny, which is about 15 kilometres north of Arras, was in the area held by the French Tenth Army from 1914 to the early part of 1916, when 327 French soldiers were buried in the Cemetery Extension to the west of what is now Plot IV. In March 1916 this part of the line was taken over by Commonwealth troops, who held the village until the end of the War. Burials were made in the Cemetery Extension until September 1918, and the 42nd Casualty Clearing

Station buried in it during the whole of this period. We know Nelson Rowberry died of wounds, so it is likely that he died there.

Nelson was single at the time of his death, although he was survived by both grandparents, his uncles and aunts and his half-sister, Doris Poulton. His headstone and Pension Index Card reveal that he'd named his grandmother, Mrs Ann Rowberry, as his next of kin. His Pension Record shows that his grandparents had moved across the road to Dinthill Cottage sometime before he signed up, and that Ann received his dependant's pension of 5 shillings a week from 20th December 1916 until March 10th 1932.

I haven't found a death record for Ann - although she would have been 87 by then, so I think we can assume this is why the payments stopped. Nelson's grandfather, Thomas, lived to the ripe old age of 92 and died at Tenbury Hospital the following year, in 1933.

As a postscript, both of Nelson's uncles, Thomas Henry and Frederick William Rowberry, also served in the First World War:- Thomas with the Machine Gun Corps and Frederick with the 1st Battalion Herefordshire Regiment; but they both survived and came home to their families.

Bobbie Matulja

November 11th 2022

Sources

- Ancestry.co.uk
- Fold 3 for Nelson Rowberry's WW1 Pension Records
- Wikipedia
- Imperial War Museum website (www.iwm.org.uk)
- The Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (www.cwg.org).
- wartimememoriesproject.com : The Wartime Memories Project - Information about the 3rd Battalion Worcestershire Regiment and Casualty Clearing Station No 42
- The Long Long Trail website (longlongtrail.co.uk) - Information about Casualty Clearing Stations 30 and 42, which were at Aubigny from April 1916
- forces-war-records.co.uk – Unit History : 3rd Battalion Worcestershire Regiment
- firstworldwar.com : memoirs and diaries first published in Everyman at War (1930) edited by C.B. Purdom for Frank Wilfred Watts' account of a night attack on Vimy Ridge on May 21st 1916
- worcestershiresoldier.org – Photo of the 3rd Battalion Worcestershire Regiment in 1916 submitted by Dave Hall. 41 year old Private George Charles Jones was his wife's maternal grandfather, who was killed in action the day before Nelson Rowberry on May 23rd 1916.
- worcestershireandmercianregimentmuseum.org – Regimental history
- worcesterregiment.com – Information about the 3rd Battalion

Details and Location Plan for Aubigny Communal Cemetery Extension from the Commonwealth War Graves Website

AUBIGNY COMMUNAL CEMETERY EXTENSION

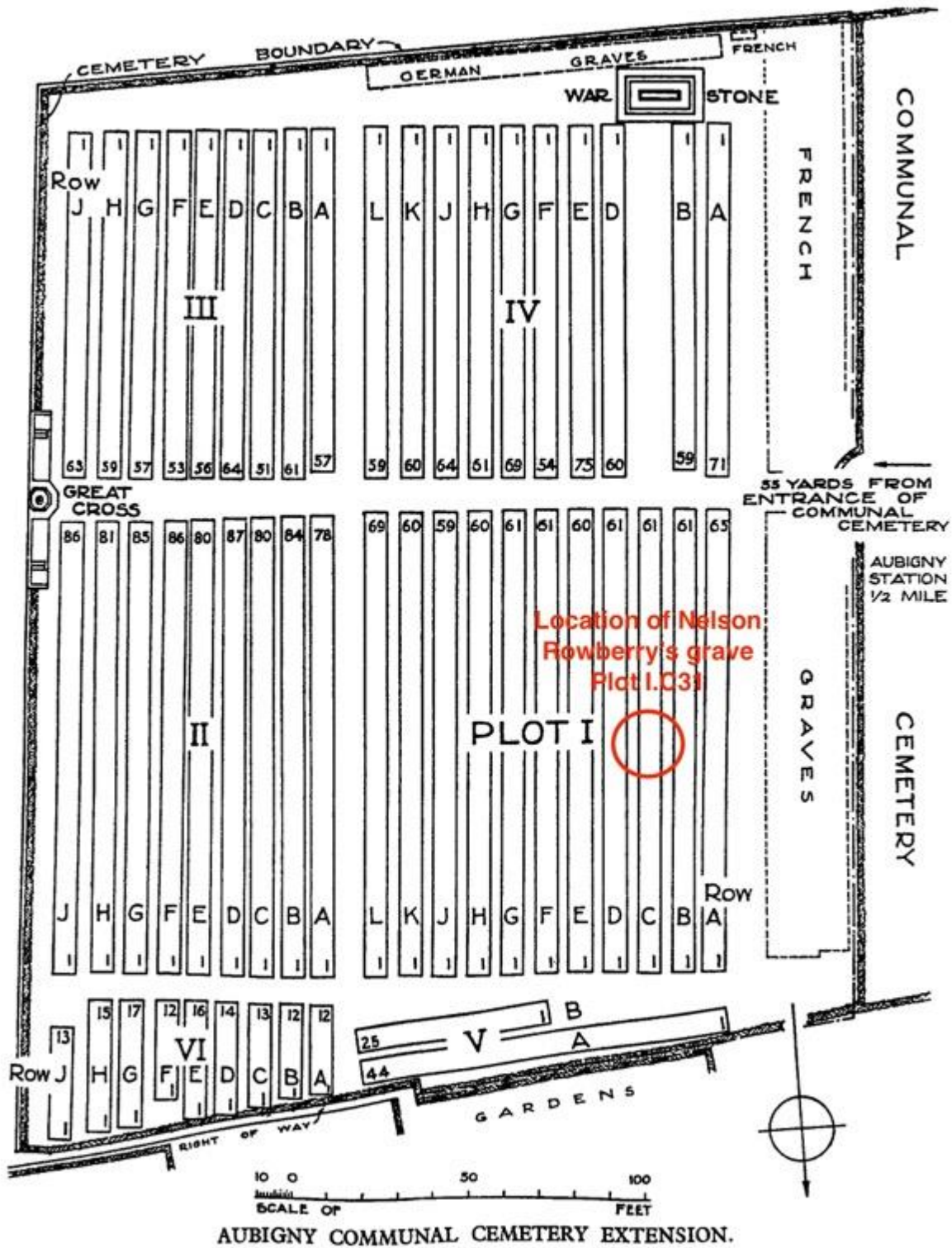
Country	France
Total Identified casualties	2853 Find these casualties
Region	Pas de Calais
Identified casualties from	First & Second World War

LOCATION INFORMATION

Aubigny-en-Artois is a village approximately 15 Kms north-west of Arras on the road (N39) to St. Pol. From the N39 turn onto the D75 towards the village of Aubigny-en-Artois. The Cemetery lies south on a road leading from the centre of the village, and the Extension is behind it.



Plan of Aubigny Communal Cemetery Extension, where Nelson Rowberry is Buried



Nelson Rowberry – Graves Registration Report Form from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Website). His surname has been mis-spelled as “Rubery”.

GRAVES REGISTRATION REPORT FORM.
(Army Form W.3372.)

COMMUNE: AUBIGNY. REPORT NO: 1. SCHEDULE NO: 8.

PLACE OF BURIAL. AUBIGNY COMMUNAL CEMETERY EXTENSION.
51c.D.12.d.5.5.

Land belongs to

The following are buried here :-

Regiment	No.	Name.	Rank and Initials	Date of Death	Cross Erected or despatched	Plot Row & Grave
Plot. 1. Row. "C".						
153/M.G.C.	20224.	✓GOURDIE.	Pte.W.	21.5.16.	E.	11.
10/Cheshires.	13161	✓FORSTER.	Pte.J.	22.5.16.	"	12.
2/R. Irish.Rifs.	11036.	✓MOORE.	Rfn.A.	21.5.16.	"	13.
1/Wilts.	4987.	✓FRANCIS.	Pte.H.	22.5.16.	"	14.
13/Cheshire	856.	✓JACKSON.	Pte.G.	23.5.16.	"	15.
16/Hvy.Bty.R.G.A.	51395.	✓TRUEMAN.	Gnr.H.	-do-	"	16.
8/L.N.Lancs.	19662.	✓KELLY.	Pte.E.	-do-	"	17.
8/L.N.Lancs.	16453.	✓SALE.	Pte.S.	-do-	"	18.
10/Cheshires.	17826.	✓COX.	Pte.E.	-do-	"	19.
10/Cheshires.	15879.	✓KNIGHT.	Pte.H.	-do-	"	20.
3/Worcester.	13798.	✓VORGER.	Sgt.W.	24.5.16.	"	21.
3/Worcester	2196.	✓BACHE.	Pte.A.	-do-	"	22.
1/R.Berks.	1143 ²	✓HOCKADAY.	Pte.A.	-do-	"	23.
7/London.	2267.	✓SHILLING.	Pte.H. (Jew)	-do-	Jew. "MEM"	24.
10/Cheshire.	14582.	✓PEMBERTON.	Pte.J.	-do-	"	25.
3/Worcester.	15286.	✓HORTON.	L/C.W.F.	-do-	"	26.
8/L.N.Lancs.	16380.	✓NELSON.	Pte.B.	-do-	"	27.
15/R.Warwick.	1258.	✓SHERGOLD.	Pte.C.	25.5.16.	"	28.
1/Wilts.	10886.	✓KILLICK.	L/C.W.H.	-do-	"	29.
10/Cheshire	15986.	✓BENNETT.	Pte.Geo. A.	-do-	"	30.
3/Worcester.	19944.	✓RUBERY.	Pte.N.	24.5.16.	"	31.
8/L.N.Lancs.	16241	✓LOMAS.	Pte.S.	25.5.16.	"	32.
1/Roy.Berks.	17078.	✓WALDEN.	Pte.J.W.	-do-	"	33.
1/Wilts.	9824.	✓WAGG.	Pte.G.	26.5.16.	"	34.
11/Cheshire.	13026.	✓MILLER.	Sgt.J.	25.5.16.	"	35.

ENTERED *27*
SLIPS CHECKED *24 28 21*

1901 Census showing Nelson Rowberry living with his "parents" (who as his WW1 Pension Records reveal were actually his grandparents), aunt and half sister, Doris Poulton, at Dinthill Farm, Boraston

Administrative County		The undermentioned Houses are situate within the boundaries of the										Parliamentary Division		Page	
Civil Parish		Ecclesiastical Parish		Sanitary District		Urban Sanitary District		Rural District		Parliamentary Division		Page			
ROAD STREET No. and No. or NAME of HOUSE	Number of HOUSES	Name and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	Age last Birthday	PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION	Employer, Master, or Own account	Working at Home	WEEKER SOLE	County	Parish or Village or Hamlet	County	Parish or Village or Hamlet			
46 Dinthill Cottage 1		Richard Ballard Head 29	Husband	29	Roadwork on Highway	Worker		Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
		Agnes & Co Wife 29	Wife	29				Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
		John & Co Son 12	Son	12				Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
		Charles & Co Son 7	Son	7				Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
47 Coffey House 1		George Prince Head 73	Head	73	General Farm Labourer	Worker		Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
48 Dinthill Farm 1		Thomas Rowberry Head 63	Head	63	Labourer on Farm	Worker		Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
		Ann So Wife 46	Wife	46				Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
		Edmy So Daughter 14	Daughter	14				Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
		Nelson So Son 5	Son	5				Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
		Ernie Poulton Head 12	Head	12				Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
		Ann Poulton Wife 12	Wife	12				Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
49 Dinthill Farm 1		Thomas Talley Head 57	Head	57	Labourer on Farm	Worker		Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
		Susan So Wife 44	Wife	44				Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
		John So Son 12	Son	12				Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
		John So Son 7	Son	7				Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
		Frank So Son 5	Son	5				Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
		Edmund So Son 2	Son	2				Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
		Agnes So Daughter 1	Daughter	1				Worcestershire	Boraston	Worcestershire	Boraston				
End of the Civil Parish of Boraston return Part 27															
Total of Houses of which the above are the only ones with two or more Inhabitants		Total of Males and of Females		10		11									

1911 Census Record for Aston Court, Knighton on Teme, where Nelson was living with the Good Family and working for them as a farm labourer

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.									
NAME AND SEX	RELATIONSHIP to HEAD of Family	AGE last Birthday	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE	PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION	EMPLOYER	WORKING at HOME	WEEKER SOLE	COUNTY	PARISH OR VILLAGE OR HAMLET
William Good	Head	46	Single	Farmer				Worcestershire	Stretton
Lacharia Good	Wife	42						Worcestershire	Stretton
May Annie Good	Daughter	23						Worcestershire	Stretton
Henry James Good	Son	10		Farmer				Worcestershire	Stretton
Henry John Good	Son	7		Private Means				Worcestershire	Stretton
Frederick Thomas Good	Son	5		Private Means				Worcestershire	Stretton
Annie Doughty	Servant	24		General Servant (Domestic)				Worcestershire	Stretton
Nelson Rowberry	Servant	18		Farm Labourer				Worcestershire	Stretton

Nelson Rowberry's WW1 Pension Record Card showing Mrs Ann Rowberry of Dinthill Cottage, Boraston as his Next of Kin

Rowberry
 M^{rs} Ann.
 Worcester
 Tenbury.
 Boraston
 Denthall cottage
 No 19944. Private Nelson Rowberry.
 3rd Worcester

~~D.P.R. 1/17.~~
 Worcester
 8123/321144
 6/17.

Nelson Rowberry – WW1 Dependents Pension Record Card (Screenshot from Fold 3 website)

File passed to Region 6 West Wales S.H. 21

DEPENDANT'S PENSION. DECEASED

Name Rowberry, Nelson Regimental No. 19944
 Regiment Worcester 3rd Bank plc

Documents received from Paymaster 5.3.17

Date and cause of death 24.5.16 Died of wounds.

Dependant M^{rs} Ann Rowberry

Address Denthall Cottage - Boraston - Tenbury

Relationship to soldier Grandmother

Pension 5/- (R.W. 29.3.17) a week from 20.12.16.

Date awarded 5.6.17 If refused

Papers P.A. reason

115/9179
 (1225) W1. D0720/6 20,000 1/17 H. & J., Ltd.

08/5262
 S.V. 5/15
 1933
 P.F. 5/15

8123/321144
 D.P. 1/17

Photograph of the 3rd Battalion Worcestershire Regiment in 1916 submitted to the worcestersoldier.org website by Dave Hall.

41 year old Private George Charles Jones (3rd from the right half kneeling) was his wife's maternal grandfather, who was killed in action the day before Nelson Rowberry on May 23rd 1916. This photograph is "right place, right time" for Nelson's unit, so it is possible he is one of the other soldiers that appears in it.



Group of 3rd Battalion Worcestershire Regiment men (1916)

Private George Charles Jones, is the third from the right half-kneeling. He has the moustache.
photo submitted by Dave Hall (Pte. Jones was his wife's maternal Grandfather)

Watercolour painting : "Ruined Country - Old Battlefield, Vimy, near La Folie Wood", by Paul Nash (1918) showing Vimy Ridge at the end of the First World War. It was close to the front line throughout the War, and was fought over several times, including the 4 day action in which Nelson Rowberry died in May 1916 and the more famous Battle of Vimy Ridge the following year. After a brief period of front line service in WW1, Paul Nash became an official War Artist who worked through both World Wars. (Screenshot 15-11-2022 from The War Art of Paul Nash, Public Domain Review).

