

## FOSTER, FRANCIS JOHN (Frank) - Died 10<sup>th</sup> December 1916 aged 22

23035 Private, 'C' Company, 4th Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment

23035 Private, 1st Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment



Photograph courtesy of the family of Stanley Bullivant, his step-nephew.

Frank was born in Scotton, the son of George (from Scotterthorpe) and Elizabeth (nee Moxham of Susworth) Foster. He was baptised at St. Peter's Church on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1894 and named after his maternal grandfather. In 1899 his sister Florence Annie ('Florry') was born.

His father worked in Scotter as a farm labourer and his family lived on Gainsborough Road. He was a religious man and became Superintendent of the Primitive Methodist Chapel's Sunday School. By 1911 George was a farmer and the family worked the land and lived at Mill Hill.

In 1916 Frank enlisted into the Army at Gainsborough and was sent with the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion to St. Peter's Barracks, Jersey. Four letters to his mother have survived; the first is dated 14<sup>th</sup> May 1916:-

*'Dear Mother*

*Just a few lines to let you know I got the parcel on Saturday Afternoon, with all the things in it safe. Thank Grandma for that soap, it just come in right I was nearly out. Well I must say I am still in the best of health and am having a grand time. We went to have tea with an old Lincolnshire Colonel who lives right on the other side of the Isle. He was a nice old Gentleman, and made a lot of us Lincolnshire Lads, before we went people told us it was the prettiest place on the Island, and it was too. I never saw a garden to come up to his in England & the tea it was a treat.*

*Me, an 5 more were invited out to tea last Tuesday by a Wesleyan Lady, we had a fine time too, we landed home at 11.30 at night. With the Pm Primitive Chapel being 6 mile away, I go to the Wesleyan, go twice on a Sunday when weather permits & the Ladies think a lot about us soldiers, after service we go to the Institute that's in the Schoolroom, & sing our favourite hymns awhile they get the refreshments ready, which we purchase at a small price. With the potato rows being only 14 ins apart, they hill them by hand with a very small plough. It is nothing fresh to see a woman pulling & a man steering the plough. Women also lead cows to and from the fields, same as men lead horses, so you see they can work, some of them not so old as Florry.*

*A wounded Officer, died last week & we all had to attend it, it was the largest funeral I have ever seen. And yesterday there was a German prisoner buried & was a real up to date one too, the other prisoners all followed they had there own band, they were all dressed in there best, & they say some of them are very rich, one of them stands 6ft 4in & is very broad too, he acts as policeman amongst them. I am very sorry to hear of the deaths you told me about, especially that of Mr Day [Robert aged 80], it will make a lot of difference to you.*

*I got my Photo took last week and am sending you four this time, & the others another time, give Aunt Sally 1 & send 1 to Sheffield. I have had a letter from Nellie at Carr and shall send her a Photo when I answer the letter, think I do not want ought this time. Remember me to all at Scotter, hoping you are all well, so goodbye for the present. With love to all. From your son.*

*tell me if you have got the Lanes let & how Dad's gone on with the Cow had 3 rainy days this Week'*

The 1<sup>st</sup> South Staffordshire's were in the Battle of the Somme and on the opening day, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916, captured Memetz and fought with other units to hold Deville Wood. This was the most forward part of the British line. Frank was sent to France, probably as a re-enforcement after the slaughter of that battle; his letter dated 22<sup>nd</sup> October reads:-

*'Just a few lines in answer to your letter which I received yesterday and was pleased to hear that you got your presents which I sent you safely, I have also received that letter and parcel and the Card from Florry a week ago. Well I must say I am in good health.*

*We have just done four days in the front line trenches came out on Saturday afternoon for a few days. It has been very wet at times his last week made it very dirty getting about, and is beginning to be rather cold at nights now had two frosty mornings,*

*but we have had some extra underclothing issued to us so it makes it better.*

*I had a letter from Aunt Sally the other day, and she said young Frank had to stay another month at Rudge Camp.*

*I think he is very lucky.*

*Well I think that is all this time from Your loving Son, Frank'*

On 31<sup>st</sup> October he wrote:-

*'Just a few lines in answer to the letter I received last Sunday. I am pleased to say I am alright, and in good health. We came to billets in a small village yesterday. It is a wet time here, rains every day. If you are having it as wet as us I know wheat sowing will not go very well. I am pleased you told me about Cyril Oglesby as I knew nothing about him, because he was transferred into the 2nd Battn. I think Col and Bob [C.S. Brumby and J.R.T. Brown (both West facing side)] must be in another Battn because I have never seen them, you must get Bob Browns address and send it to me as I should like to write to him.*

*I also must say that I get fairly well done to, am getting plenty to eat, and get a clean change of shirts and socks, and a hot bath about once a week. I think you had better send me, two pocket handkerchiefs, another pair of socks size 9s and a few sweets, and also a duster to clean my Rifle with. Pack them in a bit stronger box this time as the last one got broke. Well I think that us all I require this time. Well I must close now, hope this letter will find you well, and remember me to all inquiring friends. From your loving Son'*

Frank's last surviving letter is dated November 12<sup>th</sup>:-

*'Dear Mother,*

*Just a few lines to let you know that I have received the letter and parcel Dated Nov 8<sup>th</sup> got letter yesterday and parcel today and am pleased to say the parcel was not damaged. I sent Florry a Registered letter with a present in last week, hope she as got it by now. We have done a three days march, stayed one night in some French Barracks in a large town, and had the pleasure to look round it after we had our teas. I stood the march real well, did not affect my feet at all, but it made my legs and shoulders very stiff the first two days.*

*I am pleased to say I am in the best of health never felt better, have had a change in the weather this last week, had three fine days now. We are at a small village now billeted in a large barn, with corn stacked at each end, we lay in the middle on plenty of straw, so you see we sleep comfortable when not in trenches.*

*I often wonder how Dad and J.R. is getting on, when I see the people ploughing and taking Mangolds up, there is not too many Potatoes grown, but the French people have some splendid horses, and they drive by check, both on land and roads. Well I think that is all this time so goodbye for the present. From your loving son.*

*Just remember me to Charlie and G. Harsley. I have a very pretty Testament which I had given to me two months ago, so you need not trouble to send one.'*

Four weeks later Private Francis Foster died in the 8th Stationary Hospital at Wimereux, and was buried the next day. The town was an important hospital centre so it is possible he died there from injuries sustained on the battlefield.

Private Francis Foster is buried at the Wimereux Communal Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France. PLOT – II. Row B. Grave 4.

His family produced a memorial card which reads:-

*'Safe in his Father's home.*

*His warfare is o'er, his battle fought,  
His victory won, though dearly bought;  
His fresh young life could not be saved,  
He slumbers now in a soldier's grave'*

His sister Florry was a teacher at our Sunday School and became the second wife of Harry Bullivant. She was now the step-mother to his son Stanley from his first marriage to Mary Evelyn Gurnhill who had died in 1940. Florry continued living at Mill Hill until her death in 1961. Stanley was highly educated and worked in the United States before moving on to New Zealand where he became emeritus professor at Auckland University.



Photograph courtesy of Peter Bradshaw.