



LIEUTENANT ROBERT HAMILTON POYNDER

4TH BATTALION ATTACHED TO 2ND BATTALION, SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE REGIMENT

Robert Hamilton Poynder was born on 23 October 1895 in Bath to Blanche Elizabeth (née Phillips) and the Rev Augustus Poynder. He was baptised on 27 November in St Luke's Church, South Lyncombe, Somerset where his father was curate.

By 1901 the family had moved to Lansdown Crescent, Cheltenham and Robert had a sister, Mary Franklin. The Rev Poynder was the Curate at St Mark's Church (twice) and in 1903 he moved to Christ Church for two and a half years before he moved to St Peter's Church. Robert was educated at Glengarth School and Dean Close School between September 1907 and March 1910.

The family moved to Jersey in 1910 when the Rev Poynder accepted a curacy at St Paul's Church, St Helier. There Robert continued his education at Victoria College where he was in the Officer Training Corps.

Having spent some time working in Hove Library, Robert volunteered for service in June 1915; he was gazetted to the Royal Militia of the Island of Jersey. He trained at St Peter's Barracks in Jersey and

became a Lewis gun instructor. The South Staffordshire Regiment moved to the barracks in May 1915 and on 21 August Robert was granted a temporary commission in the 4th Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment. He was ordered overseas in November 1916 and arrived in France on 14 December whilst attached to the 2nd Battalion. He was promoted to Lieutenant in December 1917.

In the spring of 1918 he was serving in the Somme sector, in the Flesquieres salient, opposite Cambrai, at the time of the German spring offensive. The sector was not attacked heavily by storm troops, but a very heavy bombardment, in the form of gas shells, caused many casualties. On the second day of the offensive, sections on either side of the salient had been forced back so far that the salient was in danger of being surrounded and the front line was withdrawn for a distance of about a mile - the troops involved fighting a rearguard action as they did so, to avoid being overrun by the Germans.

It was during these actions on 24 March that Robert was killed; he was 22 years of age.

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The following report appeared in the *Jersey Evening Post* on 5 April:

Roll of Honour

It is with sincere regret, in which we feel sure we are joined by the whole of our readers, that we chronicle the fact that Lieutenant Robert Hamilton Poynder of the South Staffordshire Regiment, only son of the Reverend A Poynder of St Pauls and Mrs Poynder, has been killed in action. This gallant officer was educated at Dean Close School in Cheltenham and Victoria College, where he was in the OTC. Though of a somewhat retiring disposition Bob Poynder, as he was more generally known, by his splendid character endeared himself to all he came into contact with and had a large circle of friends. Though not one of those who would have chosen the Army as a profession, when the call of duty came he was not found wanting and loyally offered his services and in 1915 was gazetted 2nd Lieutenant in the 1st Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment [sic]. He had been in France for a considerable period and was gazetted Lieutenant some time back having proved himself a most painstaking and efficient officer held in the highest regard by his superiors and highly respected by his men. He only returned to the Front from leave a few weeks back and was in the memorable Battle of Cambrai, his division being one of those specially congratulated by Sir Douglas Haig for holding a most important part of the line and so saving the situation at a critical time. In the heavy fighting on 24 March his Company was overwhelmed by the enemy and he was shot in the chest, the gallant officer dying with his face to the foe. We would offer our sincere condolences to the Reverend, Mrs and Miss Poynder in their great bereavement.

This article appeared in the *Victoria College Book of Remembrance* which was published in 1920:

Robert Hamilton Poynder, son of the Reverend A Poynder, Incumbent of St. Paul's, Jersey, was born at South Lyncombe, Bath, 23rd October, 1895. He was educated at Glengarth and Dean Close schools at Cheltenham until his parents came to Jersey, when he entered College, remaining for two years, 1910-1912. After a year's private tuition his father, wishing him to learn business methods, sent him to a friend at Hove in whose Library he was at work until he volunteered for service in June 1915. One who knew him there wrote: "Everyone will miss his

sweet influence. Many here in Hove will long remember his sojourn among us ..."

Having been gazetted to the RMJ [Royal Militia Island of Jersey], and thence to the South Staffordshire Regiment, he was trained at St Peter's Barracks, Jersey, and subsequently was for many months Lewis Gun Instructor, until he was ordered overseas in November 1916, and attached to the 2nd Battalion, South Staffordshire Regiment, in due course becoming Lieutenant. In December 1917, he was in action at Cambrai, and his Division was complimented by Sir Douglas Haig for saving a critical situation.

On 21st March 1918, the Battalion had just come out for a much needed "rest", when they received orders to proceed again up the line in consequence of the great German attack. Poynder was in command of his Company, and on Palm Sunday, 24th March, whilst leading his men, was shot through the chest and killed instantaneously.

His Company Commander wrote: "I think it will help you to know how very popular he was amongst us and what a splendid officer he was. His men admired him greatly, and many have come to me to express personally how much they feel his loss. For myself I have lost a good 'pal'. He often acted for me as Company Commander, and "right well he did it. ""

A tablet to his memory has been placed in St. Paul's Church by the congregation, among whom he had many friends.

A memorial service has held in St Paul's Church in September where the memorial tablet to Robert was unveiled. Addressing the congregation the Dean said: "Lieutenant Poynder fell leading his Company against the enemy to save Paris, to save England, to save Jersey and to save all of us, he fell so that we in this Island could live in peace, and when we looked at the tablet we would remember him and many others who had gone."

Lieutenant Robert Hamilton Poynder has no known grave and is commemorated on the Arras Memorial, Bay 6. He is remembered on the following Rolls of Honour: Christ Church, Dean Close School and St Stephen's Church in Cheltenham; Hove Library and All Saints' Church in Hove, and Victoria College in St Helier, Jersey.

Sources and acknowledgements:

Leaving all that was dear : Cheltenham and the Great War by J Devereux & G Sacker
Victoria College Book of Remembrance

Ancestry
Commonwealth War Graves Commission
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Find My Past

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