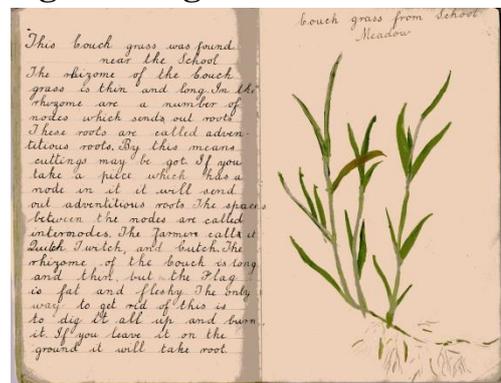


Sgt F. Woodman – The Queen’s (Royal West Surrey Regiment)

Frank Woodman was born in Marylebone in 1893, the son of Charles and Rose Woodman. Charles had been a regular soldier in the Royal Dragoon Guards and later served in India and the Boer War. On leaving the Army he settled with his family in Westcott where he became a domestic gardener. He and his family lived in Bailey Road.

Frank went to the village school where in 1906 he gained a scholarship to Dorking High School. Westcott School obtained good academic results with four scholarships that year. May Rose gained the highest marks in the County and Frank gained his scholarship in company with George Tarrant whose name, sadly, is also on our Memorial.

It is evident that Frank was very interested in gardening. We do not have a photograph of Frank, but our Local History Group does have a school notebook on gardening that he wrote and illustrated when he was 12 years old - an extract is shown on the right. After leaving school Frank became a gardener on the Ashcombe estate and was a bellringer at the estate church of St Barnabas, Ranmore. In September 1914 he married Jessie Egan in Dorking Register Office; she came from Newmarket in Suffolk and may have been in service on the estate. Frank and Jessie subsequently had a daughter, Margaret, who was born in 1915.



Frank enlisted at Dorking and his marriage certificate records him as serving with the 5th Bn of the Queen’s (Royal West Surrey Regiment); this would have been the 2/5th Bn which had just been formed at Guildford. He was later transferred to the 2/4th Bn of the regiment, possibly in May 1915; at that time some 400 men of Frank’s battalion were attached to the 2/4th stationed in the Middle East in readiness for the Gallipoli campaign. The battalion was later based in Egypt and took part in the early stages of General Allenby’s advance through Palestine. This was to continue northwards through Syria until the Turks accepted defeat in October 1918.

In June 1918 Frank Woodman, by then a Sergeant, was due for leave. However, he had to move with the battalion from Egypt to France where it was needed, as part of the 34th Division, to reinforce the French sector of the front on the River Marne. From 23rd July to 2nd August the battalion was engaged in what became known as the Battle of Soissonais-Ourcq.

They had to mount attacks against the enemy lines on the 23rd and 29th July. The regimental diary contains these entries which describe the actions that took place over the following days:

30th July ... 'The enemy shelled continuously through the day and also used gas. The artillery action continued throughout the night becoming especially violent at dawn, ceasing at 6 a.m.'

31st July 'The 31st was fine and hot with many flies; in the afternoon the enemy shelling began again and continued throughout the night. At midnight our Headquarters with those of 4th R.Sussex moved forward to the front line.'

On 1st August the Battalion mounted another attack with the French which advanced the line 1000 yards. The diary then contains these entries for the following days:

2nd August 'The morning Aug 2nd was very wet. Everything was very quiet throughout the day, and we collected and buried our dead. The night was fairly quiet and the men came out of the line, only picquets being left in the trenches.'

3rd/4th August 'On the afternoon of Aug 3rd the battlefield was cleared, and at 9 a.m. on the 4th the battalion was taken away by motor lorries to Rouville.'

It was during the lengthy enemy bombardments on 31st July that Sgt. Frank Woodman was killed. He is buried in the Oulchy-le-Chateau Churchyard Extension which holds the graves of 91 British soldiers. We wish to record our gratitude to Frank's youngest brother, Kenneth, who some years ago gave us information about Frank and his family and presented the school notebook, mentioned above, to the School Museum.

After the war 'Soissonais-Ourcq' was one of the battle honours awarded to The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment).