

Name, Rank & Regiment of Soldier:
Woolley, Thomas Hugh Corbett
 Captain

2/8th Sherwood Foresters



Date of birth	Date KIA	Age
20 th October 1888	27 th April 1917	28

Background: Thomas Hugh Corbett Woolley



Above; 12 Minster Yard, Lincoln 2016

Thomas Woolley was the eldest son of Reginald Woolley and Nora Frances Twentyman and the grandson of Thomas Smith Woolley Jr., land agent of Smith Woolley & Wigram on The Green, S Collingham. Thomas (usually known as Hugh) was educated at prep school in Folkestone and then went on to Lancing College 1902-1905. By 1906 he working for Smith Woolley & Wigram as a land agent. His address was 12 Minster Yard, Lincoln (left) where he was born and lived with his parents and brothers Charles and Edward. He married in 1913. His address was given as 'The Cottage' South Collingham¹ [now Westfield House, Westfield Lane] although at the time of his death his wife, Violet Joan (née Tanner 1888-1932), and baby daughter, Vera Joan (born November 1916) were living in 40 Abingdon Road, South Kensington. Violet applied for his medals in March 1921². She never remarried and died in 'Adanac' Hermitage, Berkshire in 1932.

His Aunt Rose's 19-year-old son, Lt. Ronald Aitchison, was the first on the Collingham War Memorials to be killed in action (see separate profile).

¹ He perhaps never lived there. According to his Obituary in the South Collingham Parish Newsletter he had planned to move to Collingham permanently after the war. The Cottage was one of several properties owned by the Smith-Woolleys and originally used as a hunting lodge for John Woolley, brother of Thomas Smith Woolley Jr.

² Lancing Roll of Honour website page <http://www.hambo.org/lancing/>

Military History: Captain T H C Woolley

Hugh Woolley had been involved in the militia (territorial force) based in Collingham and founded by his grandfather in 1856, since 1906. Prior to that he had been a Lance Corporal in the Lancing College Officer Training Corps. However, he had resigned his commission with the 4th Notts & Derby owing to ill-health in 1910.

The Lancing Roll of Honour provides the following information: *'Following the outbreak of war, he re-joined his old battalion and assisted in training the men at their drill hall at Newark-on-Trent at his own expense. He applied for a commission in the 8th Battalion Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment on the 26th of October 1914 in an application which was supported by Colonel G.L. Foljambe, former Commanding Officer of the battalion. At a medical examination it was recorded that he was five feet seven inches tall. He was commissioned with the rank of Lieutenant on the 1st of September 1914 and was promoted to Captain on the 5th of November 1914.'*³

The battalion was posted to Ireland in April 1915 where they served during the Easter Uprising 1916. However, the battalion's history⁴ shows Captain Woolley was ill with flu at the time and did not participate in the clashes. The 2/8th landed in France in February 1917.'

Hargicourt, Nr. St Quentin, Picardy *'The Hindenburg Line'*

On the 27th of April 1917 the 2/8th Battalion Sherwood Foresters⁵ was ordered to attack a portion of a switch trench at **Hargicourt**, part of the German defences known as the Hindenburg Line. The night before the attack he met with other officers from the battalion and in the words of the battalion history:

'The officers of three of the companies met together in a cellar to have a final yarn, and it was noticeable that Captain Woolley was the life and soul of the party, happily discussing what he would do when the war was over in company with his wife and child, to whom he was devoted. Alas! He was the only one amongst those gathered there to make the supreme sacrifice.'

During the attack Thomas Woolley, at the head a platoon from B Company, was the first into the enemy switch trench but was killed immediately. The enemy counterattacked driving the men of B Company back and out of the position but it was later recaptured and his body was recovered. His Commanding Officer, Lt. Col Oates, wrote: *'He was gallantly leading his Company in action when he fell, just doing (as he always did) a little more hard work and a little more courageous work than his body would stand. What his Company will do without him I do not know, as his whole life was wrapped up in their welfare. I shall miss him terribly.'*

³ Ibid footnote 2

⁴ The Sherwood Foresters in the Great War Lt Col W C Oates 1920

⁵ The 2/8th were part of the 178th Brigade/79th division at the time

Military History : T H C Smith Woolley (continued)

The battalion history⁶ stated:

"The death of Captain Woolley was deeply felt throughout the Battalion. Captain Woolley's name was almost a household name in the 2/8th Battalion, and in the old 4th Notts; which preceded it, as three generations of that family had commanded one of the companies. Captain Woolley was an officer of exceptional ability and boundless energy, his pluck and vitality making up to some extent for a rather frail body and indifferent health"

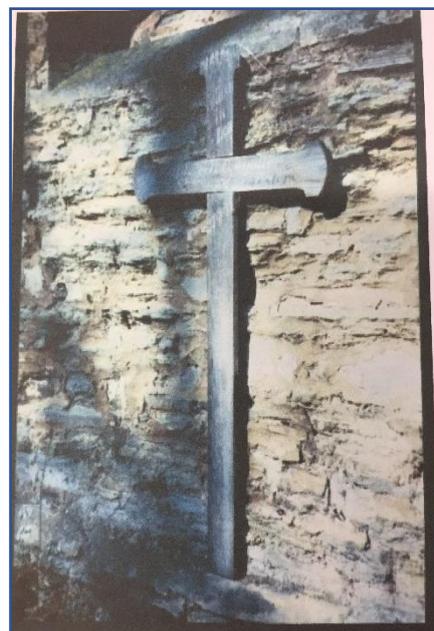
Captain Woolley was buried with military honours on the 29th of April along with others from his Company who had fallen. He was mentioned in despatches, which was announced in the London Gazette of the 21st December 1917, for '*gallant and distinguished service in the field*'.⁷

Captain T H C Woolley is buried in Templeux-le-Guerard Cemetery, 26 km east of Peronne, France. Plot 1, Row C Grave 28. He is remembered on the St John the Baptist Church Roll of Honour & Parishioners' Plaque. His wooden grave marker is also classed as an official war memorial.

Captain T H C Woolley's Grave Marker St John the Baptist Church

Location: Above the Parishioners' Plaque. However, it was originally on the outside of the chancel wall of the church until the late David Collins (1928-2007), a military enthusiast and member of Collingham and District Local History Society Committee, sought permission to bring it inside to preserve it from weathering. With the backing of the then vicar, Rev A. A. Conn and the churchwarden Gordon Lauder. Faculty for moving the grave marker was granted by the Southwell Diocese. It was re-sited and affixed above the brass War Memorial by David Tingle on January 3rd 1996.⁸

Imperial War Memorial No: 27136



Above: Capt. Woolley's cross in its original position outside St John the Baptist. Photo David Collins 1995

⁶ Lt Col Coape Oates War Diary 'The Sherwood Foresters in the Great War the 2/8th Battalion published by J & H Bell 1920

⁷ http://www.hambo.org/lancing/view_man.php?id=48

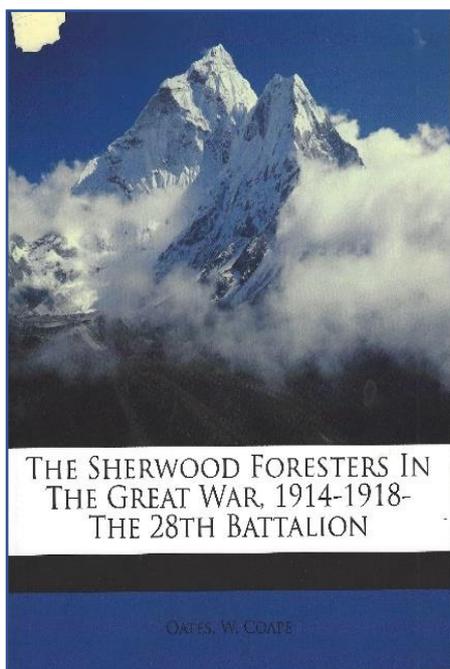
⁸ Information supplied by M Cobb, current churchwarden of St John the Baptist 17th Feb 2018

Description: Wooden grave marker (also known as a battlefield cross) with rounded 'nubs' at the top of the shaft and on the crossbeam ends. A faded hand-painted inscription reads 'Killed in Action' then on the crossbeam 'Capt. T H C Woolley 2/8 Sherwood Foresters' Beneath that, sloping upwards, is number 27417 (27th April 1917 – the day Woolley was killed in action at Hargicourt on the Somme).



Left: Captain Woolley's grave marker above the Roll of Honour, St John the Baptist Church, Collingham

Photo: HP 2016



April 1998

HP 2/4/2018

Further Reading

Lt/Col Coape Oates' War Diary '*The Sherwood Foresters in the Great War the 2/8th Battalion*' published by J & H Bell 1920. Since republished and available in print ISBN 9781172602704 £17.99 There is a copy of the original in Newark Library Reference Section.

William Coape Oates, JP., DSO, (1862-1942) commanded the 2/8th Sherwood Foresters, which was the local battalion. He lived in Besthorpe.

Sources:

Lancing College Roll of Honour (with permission to use image of T Woolley)

Ancestry.co.uk

David Collins: Tribute to T H C Woolley first appeared in Fleet

