

Thomas Francis Halford Fremantle

Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry

1897 – 1915



Thomas Francis Halford Fremantle, known as Halford, was born on 20th January 1897 in Marylebone, London. He was the eldest son of the 3rd Lord and Lady Cottesloe, the Hon Thomas Francis Fremantle and Florence Annie Alexandra Tapling. In 1901, aged four, he lived in Marylebone with his parents, sister Florence aged three (1898) and brother John WH aged one (1900). In 1911 he was a student, living at The Old House, Swanbourne with his parents and brothers and sisters, Edward (1902), Margaret (1905), Christopher (1907) and Bride (1910).

He won a scholarship to Eton on 1910, and won prizes for chemistry and English verse, as well as representing his school in shooting. Because of the outbreak of the war, he left school a year early, joining the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry in September 1914. He was in C Company of the 5th Battalion, where he became a 2nd Lieutenant.



The 5th (Service) Battalion has been formed in Oxford in August 1914, as part of the First New Army, and then moved to Aldershot to join the 42nd Brigade of the 14th Division. On 21st May 1915, they mobilised for war, and landed at Bologne, becoming engaged in various actions on the Western Front, including the Action of Hooge, part of the first flamethrower attack by the Germans, and then the Second Attack on Bellewaarde (see separate sheet for details). It was during this attack that Halford was wounded when a shell (a whizz-bang) burst over the trench in which he was sheltering. He was injured by shrapnel in the head and back, and taken to a hospital in Bologne.



His parents were able to visit Halford in hospital (the British Red Cross Hospital at Le Touquet), and he clung to life for 3 weeks, before dying of his wounds on 17th October 1915.

He was buried at Etaples Military Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France.

A memorial service was held for Thomas Fremantle in Swanbourne on Friday 22nd October, 1915, when large numbers of village people turned out to pay their respects and offer their sympathy to the grieving members of the Fremantle family.

SWANBOURNE PAROCHIAL MAGAZINE—NOVEMBER, 1915.

In Memoriam.

Second Lieutenant Thomas Francis Halford Fremantle, 5th Oxford and Bucks L. I.,

Eldest son of Colonel the Hon. T. F. and Mrs. Fremantle, of Swanbourne, died in France on Sunday, October 17, of wounds received through the bursting of a shell in the trenches on September 25, when he was in charge of his company, of which he held temporary command for some weeks. He was born on January 20, 1897, and went to Eton in 1910, having won a scholarship there. He gained the school chemistry prize in 1914, and in 1913, at the age of 16½ years, the Hervey English Verse Prize. He was for two years in the Eton O. T. C., shot in the Eton VIII for the Ashburton Shield at Bisley in 1913 and 1914, and in the latter year represented the school for the Spencer Cup, in which he gained fourth place among over 50 competitors. He would normally have remained at Eton till July, 1915, but after the war broke out he left school and joined the New Army in September, 1914, at the age of 17½ years.

On May 20 he went with his battalion to France. His first action was that at Hooge on June 16, to which the captain commanding his company refers in a letter written on August 29:—"He doesn't know what fear is and is tireless in his duties in the trench. I congratulate you on all he's done. Half his initiative, pluck, and resource in an older man would be remarkable, but in a lad of his age it is extraordinary. On June 16, under a veritable hell of shells, he was quietly reorganizing his platoon in the open when I arrived. He had been forward and got the lie of the ground and was able to lead the company on from a place where a protracted halt must have meant heavy casualties." Another officer wrote on October 25:—"We were all so fond of him, and so many had come to rely on his judgment as upon that of a far older and more experienced person—such was his quality." A letter from the commanding officer of his battalion, written just after he was wounded, says:—"His conduct all through has been most gallant, and he has always shown a fearless example to his men." It is understood that his name was sent in from his regiment with a recommendation for the Military Cross. In the words of one who knew him intimately at Eton:—"No length of days could have made him more fit to stand in God's presence—where he is now, and, indeed, has always been. He has lived and died nobly, in a way peculiarly his own." [From "The Times"].

The deep sympathy felt by the parishioners with Colonel and Mrs. Fremantle was shewn by the large congregation which assembled at the Memorial Service for their son held in Swanbourne Church, on Friday evening, October 22nd.

Private Nimrod Boughton is reported wounded and missing; Private H. Davis missing; the following are still in hospital but all are reported to be making favourable progress:—Trooper William Kibble and Private H. Featherstone (wounded); Troopers H. Colgrove, A. Dancer, J. F. Featherstone (sick). To the names of those already printed in the Magazine as serving King and Country should be added—Privates Walter Turvey and Thomas S. Roads (at present in France), and Private George Leonard who has enlisted in Canada.

[P.T.O.]