

CHICK, George (Information from his grandson Mervyn Timms)

Eli George Chick (known as George Chick) was born 24th September 1893 at the coal mining village of Caerau, Glamorganshire. He was the third of eleven children to George Chick and Lucy Frances, nee Summers.

Although his birth was registered as George, four years later at his baptism at Stockland he was named Eli George, both traditional Chick family names going back many generations. Before George was born his parents, with their two year old daughter Ethel Susan who was born at Hill Common, Membury in 1888, had moved from Membury to Cardiff, Glamorganshire around 1890, and there a son John was born (known as Jack) in 1891, before the family moved into Sweldon Cottage at Sweldon Farm in Caerau, in March 1893. At Sweldon Farm George's father worked for farmer William Emerson.

George's parents returned to Membury in 1896 and lived at Longbridge. George started school at Membury on 31 Oct 1898, walking over two miles to school each day from Longbridge, with Ethel Susan and Jack, and later with Eva May.

The family moved to a farm cottage at Castle, Membury, in the Spring of 1899, where George's father worked as a farm carter. Young George was already familiar with Castle; it was where Captain Buckle, retired Commander R.N. laid on a tea for the Membury school children each summer.

The itinerant lifestyle of farm workers meant that they were never settled long enough to make a real home for their families which had an adverse affect on the children's education. After one year at Castle the Chick family moved to Smallridge near Axminster; where by 1901 they lived in a 2 up and 2 down farm cottage near the Ridgeway Inn. While living at Smallridge George and his siblings went to school at All Saints, starting there in May 1900. The 7th and 8th Chick children were born at Smallridge before the family returned to Membury in March 1903.

George's family moved into Cribhouse above Yarty farm. His father worked as carter at Yarty farm for farmer Robert Burrough. George and his school-age siblings started school at Membury on 19th March 1903. While living at Membury his parents exhibited their home grown produce at the Membury Horticultural Shows; his father his vegetables and his mother her poultry, ducks, flowers and potted plants. Even George and his sister Eva May were awarded prizes for their show of wild flowers in the Children Under 15 class, in 1905.

When the family left Cribhouse in 1908 they moved into another tied cottage, Gillett's at Yarcombe. George had already left school by now and been working for two years as a farm carter. They were at Gillets Cottage for one year.

In March 1909 George went with his parents to live at Hill Cottage, although within Stockland parish it was often alluded to as in Dalwood, on the opposite side of the Yarty River from Yarty Farm. George and his father worked at Lower Farm for Charlie Burrough; son of Robert Burrough who his father had worked for previously at Yarty Farm. Hill Cottage was a One-down and Two-up; (kitchen and two bedrooms) and their water had to be carried from the well in a field opposite.

At Hill Cottage George's mother gave birth to her 12th and last child, Kathleen Emma in 1909. George's oldest sister Ethel Susan got married to Will Cross that year and moved to Hawkchurch, and his younger sister Eva May had recently left school and she went to Yetlands farm as a dairymaid.

This still left a family of 11 at home, so George went to live with his aunt Liz and uncle Walter Clark in Osmore Cottage, at Furley, Membury. While there, George worked at Osmore Farm. And he signed up at 17 years and six months, was attested, and received his posting to 1st Battalion the Somerset Light Infantry; Private 9161.

At outbreak of WW1 in early August 1914 George was at Colchester. From 9th to the 16th August he and his regiment went through full training and route marching, each man carrying full pack and 120 rounds of ammunition. Then on 17th August it was off to Harrow where his regiment was attached to the 4th Brigade, before travelling by train to Southampton docks where they embarked aboard the SS Braemar Castle.

They arrived at Le Havre on 22nd August and the next morning they entrained into open topped cattle wagons. George arrived in Belgium in the area of Le Cateau on 24th August 1914, the second day of the Mons battle and almost immediately was fighting in the battle for Le Cateau. His battalion was to assist the B.E.F. and French troops who were retreating from Mons, hotly pursued by the German army. His regiment was deployed to give those retreating from Mons a safe passage into Le Cateau and to hold off the advancing Germans as long as possible. During a series of battles around Le Cateau the B.E.F. were ordered to retire, and thus began the long march south towards Paris with the German army harassing them all the way until just short of the capital the allies managed a great U-Turn and drove the enemy into retreat and eventual stalemate and trench warfare.

On the 4th December he was admitted to hospital near the French coast and prepared for return to England. He was admitted to hospital in England on 6th December 1914. He spent the next six months of 1915 recovering from his wound; first in hospital, then to one of the convalescent units. His last few days were spent at home with his parents in Membury (during the war his parents were at Haverlands farm,) and was then ordered to return to France, arriving there 22nd June 1915.

He was wounded again in Plugsteert Wood on 1 December 1914 and went to hospital. He rejoined his Battalion on 4th July 1915 within the area of the Ypres Salient.

Preparing for the Somme Offensive; 1916. The cold and wet conditions in the muddy trenches took their toll upon the men with colds, coughs and flu. George became one of those victims and on 26th February 1916 he was admitted to 10 Field Ambulance with influenza. Out of the trenches to recover, he rejoined his Battalion on 5th March.

On 3rd April 1916 George Chick was appointed unpaid Lance Corporal.

On 22nd June 1916 the 1st Somersets moved to Mailly Maillet, 4.3 km from Beaumont Hamel, one of the fortress villages just behind the German lines. Two days later the preliminary bombardment of the German positions began in preparation to The Battle of the Somme.

During the 1st day of the Battle of the Somme, George received two promotions; first as Paid Lance Corporal. And after hours of fighting and losses, he was Appointed and Confirmed as Acting Corporal. Three weeks after the hell of the Somme, George Chick, with the 1st Somersets was off to the Ypres Salient again. On 8th August they suffered shelling and a gas attack. Although there were some casualties from the shelling, most of the 1st Somerset casualties were from gas. George and his regiment came out of the Salient, 16th Sept 1916.

Appointed Provost Sergeant, 1st Battalion Somerset Light Infantry. 24th October 1916. After another uncomfortable night in the trenches they were relieved by the 19th Brigade and marched to Trones Wood (in reality called Bois de Troncs, south of Guillemont,) where they had another uncomfortable night under poor shelters. It was here in Trones Wood or nearby, that this day George was promoted to Provost Sergeant

In December 1916, George returned to England; he married Beatrice Hellier at Axminster on 12th Dec 1916. A few days later he was back in the trenches.

On 20th March 1917 George was admitted to 12 Surgical Hospital with inflammation of the larynx. Following his recovery he joined his battalion in training and preparing for the Arras Offensive.

From 9th April - 16th May 1917, he was fighting at First Battle of the Scarpe, known as the Arras Offensive.

On 21st May 1917 George Chick left France for good. He returned to England where after a few days rest, was transferred to the 3rd Battalion Somerset Light Infantry stationed at Bull Point and forts around Devonport and Plymouth as part of coastal defence.

On 17th November 1917 George in company with the 3rd Battalion Somerset Light Infantry was sent to Ireland, arriving at Dublin enroute to Londonderry. On 4th March 1918 the Battalion moved into Palace Barracks, Holywood, near Belfast. George served in Ireland with this battalion for two years. During this time he went to the Elm Park Bombing School in Dublin where in April 1918 he qualified as First Class Bombing Instructor, and became an instructor in hand grenades.

George Chick was honourably discharged from service on 29th March 1919.

His first battle of the Great War made a lasting impression upon him; hence the name-plate upon his home in Beer, " Le Cateau."

George Chick died at Redhills Hospital, Exeter, in July 1976