

World War 1 - Upper Hopton Village



Ben Cassell

Rank: Private

Lost his life (age 19) 24th March 1918 (France & Flanders)

**2nd/6th Bn., Prince of Wales
(North Staffordshire Regiment)**



Summary

Ben Cassell's family home was Double Six (Lees Buildings), Upper Hopton where he was raised by his parents Albert and Alma Cassell. He enlisted in November 1916 when he was 18 years old.

He lost his life (age 19) on March 1918 whilst serving on the Western front.

We know that Ben was killed in action on the 24th March 1918 and remembered at the Arras memorial, it is highly likely therefore that he was killed during the German spring offensive which started on the 21st March 1918.

The Regimental War Diaries give details of a battle at Bullecourt on the 21st March 1918 where they were completely overrun by the German Offensive sustaining a high level of casualties. It is probable that Ben was badly injured in this attack and died on the 24th March.

His sacrifice is remembered at the Arras Memorial in France.

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Ben Cassell

Family details

Date of Birth	30th April 1898
Date of Baptism	21st May 1898
Church Baptised	St John's, Upper Hopton
Father	Albert
Father's occupation	Corporation labourer
Mother	Alma
Siblings	Edith, 2nd Sister (name unknown - 5 years older than Edith) and a brother 11 years older than Edith.
Parents residence	Address was Mount Pleasant, Jackroyd Lane at Baptism and Double Six (Lees Buildings) at enlistment, the 1911 census shows address as Cottage Row (Blank Seven).
Soldiers residence	As above
Soldiers Occupation	School in 1911
Married	
Spouse	
Children	
Burial / Memorial	Arras Memorial at Faubourg-D'Ameins Cemetery Arras, France
Age at death	19

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Cassell family census 1911 - note the surname is spelt Castle



CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Number of Schedule **128**
(To be filled up by the Enumerator after completion)

Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.

The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, or in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family	AGE last Birthday and SEX	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE	PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of Person aged 15 years and upwards	BIRTHPLACE of every person	NATIONALITY of every person	INFORMITY
1. Albert Castle	Head	53	Married	Corporation Labourer	Yorkshire Hopton	English	
2. Anna Castle	Wife	54	Married 20		Yorkshire Hopton	English	
3. Edith Castle	Daughter	15	Single	Millhand	Yorkshire Hopton	English	
4. Ben Castle	Son	12		Coal Miner	Yorkshire Hopton	English	
5. Fred Hepworth	Boarder	24	Single	Coal Miner	Yorkshire Hopton	English	
6. James Wright	Boarder	23	Single	Coal Miner	Liverpool Oldham	English	

(To be filled up by the Enumerator)

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling)

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature **Albert Castle**
Post Address **Cottage Row Upper Hopton**

Note that in the above census the Castle's or Cassell's had two boarders (Fred Hepworth and James Wright) who worked in the coal mine.

The surname in the census is spelt Castle rather than Cassell. The difference in spelling of the surname might be attributed to the fact that the father (Albert) could not write (one can see that the post mistress, Eleanor Barker had to sign his mark X, see military document on the following page)

Herbert Castle (born 5 Jan 1893) and Joe Castle (born 6 Dec 1894) were brothers, but did you know that Ben Cassell was their first cousin? Ben's Dad Albert was the brother of Herbert & Joe's Dad Robert.

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Cassell Family

James & Mary Cassell (Ben Cassell's grandparents) of Upper Hopton had six children (or thereabouts)

- Thomas Cassell b.1855
- Albert Cassell b.1857 (he was Ben Cassell's Dad)
- Robert Cassell 1859-1934 (he was Herbert & Joe Castle's Dad)
- Oliver Cassell 1866-1949 (on the photo)
- James Cassell 1873
- Willy Cassell 1877



The photograph outside Laithe farm shows Peter Castle, John Castle, George Haigh, George William Castle, Herbert Sykes and Oliver Castle in 1944. Oliver Cassell or Castle is on the right hand end of the photo wearing a top hat.

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George William Castle b.1886 and John Castle b.1901 were Oliver's sons and Peter Castle b.1934 was his grandson.

Herbert Sykes standing next to Oliver Castle is almost certainly the Herbert Sykes born 1894 brother to Willie and Walter. They were the sons of Arthur & Ellen Sykes.

I am not sure exactly what is going on in the photo but we know it was taken in the mid 1940s. According to the 1940 electoral roll in that year Oliver Castle & George William Castle were living at 49 Jackroyd Lane; Herbert Sykes was living at 23 Jackroyd Lane and George Haigh was living at 15 Jackroyd Lane, so they were all neighbours. John Castle (Oliver's son) was at that time living at 13 Hill Top Crescent.


I believe that Oliver Castle had a small farm on Jackroyd Lane (perhaps it was Laithe farm)?

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Military Details

Attestation / Enlistment	6th November 1916
Deployment	8th May 1917
Rank	Private
Medals	British War Medal Victory Medal
Regiment number	31888
Regiment	2nd/6th Bn., Prince of Wales (North Staffordshire Regiment)
Regimental Badge	
Where killed	France & Flanders
Cemetery or Memorial	Arras Memorial at Faubourg-D'Amiens Cemetery Arras, France
Date of death	24th March 1918

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2/6th Battalion Prince of Wales (North Staffordshire Regiment) Territorial Force

Jan 1917 - Moved to Fovant, Salisbury Plain for training

25.02.1917 Mobilised for war and landed in France and engaged in various actions on the Western Front including;

During 1917 - The pursuit of the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line, The Battle of the Menin Road Ridge, The Battle of Polygon Wood, The capture of Bournal Wood.

During 1918 - The Battle of Bapaume, The Battle of Bailleul, The First Battle of Kemmel Ridge.

09.05.1918 Reduced to training cadre and transferred to the 66th Division.

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Sir Douglas Haig's Despatch on the German spring offensive (extracts only are given below)



*This was a very long despatch covering the **winter operations** preceding the German offensives, the 21 March 1918 attack and subsequent*

War Office, 21st October, 1918.
General Headquarters,
20th July, 1918.

Indications of the Coming Attack.

(8) Towards the middle of February, 1918, it became evident that the enemy was preparing for a big offensive on the Western front. It was known from various sources that he had been steadily increasing his forces in the Western theatre since the beginning of November, 1917. In three and a half months 28 infantry divisions had been transferred from the Eastern theatre and 6 infantry divisions from the Italian theatre. There were reports that further reinforcements were on their way to the West, and it was also known that the enemy had greatly increased his heavy artillery in the Western theatre during the same period.

As the 21st March approached it became certain that an attack on Sensee River southwards was imminent, and counter-preparation was carried out nightly by our artillery on the threatened front. By the 21st March the number of German infantry divisions in the Western theatre had risen to 192, an increase of 46 since the 1st November, 1917.

The Attack Opened. (The German offensive Operation Michael)

(13) Shortly before 5 a.m. on the 21st March, a bombardment of great intensity, with gas and high explosive shell from all natures of artillery and trench mortars was opened against practically the whole fronts of the Fifth and Third Armies from the Oise to the Scarpe River, while road centres and railways as far back as St. Pol were engaged by high velocity guns. Violent bombardments were opened also on the French front in wide sectors east and north-east of Reims, and on portions of the British front between the Scarpe River and Lens.

The Second Day of the Battle.

(18) On the morning of the 22nd March the ground was again enveloped in thick

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mist, under cover of which the enemy renewed his attacks in great strength all along the line. Fighting was again very heavy, and short-range fire from guns, rifles, and machine guns caused enormous losses to the enemy's troops. The weight of his attack, however, combined with the impossibility of observing beforehand and engaging with artillery the massing of his troops, enabled him to press forward.

The Withdrawal to the Somme.

(23) Accordingly, at 11 p.m. on the 22nd March, orders were issued by the Fifth Army Commander that the troops of the XVIII Corps should fall back during the night behind the line of the Somme south of Voyennes, in touch, with the III. Corps on their right; while the XIX and VII Corps endeavoured to secure the main Peronne bridgehead on the line Croix Molognaux - Monday Lagache - Vraignes, and thence northwards along the third zone of defence to the junction with the Third Army about Equancourt. These withdrawals were carried out under constant pressure from the enemy

The Retreat Across the Somme Battlefield.

(30) During the night of the 23rd/24th March the situation on the battle front remained unchanged as far south as the neighbourhood of Ytres. Beyond that point divisions and brigades had lost touch in the course of their frequent withdrawals, and under the constant pressure of the enemy the rearward movement continued

We know that Ben was killed in action on the 24th March 1918 and remembered at the Arras memorial, it is highly likely therefore that he was killed during the German spring offensive in 1918 described above. See below an extract from the Regimental War Diaries which describes the battle in which Ben was most likely injured and later died.

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War Diaries - 2/6th Prince of Wales (North Staffordshire Regiment)

13th March 1918 – MOREUIL MORY

The Battalion moved to Assembly Area at LE SUCRE. VAULX-VRAUCOURT to be prepared for enemy attack but the attack did not materialise.

19th March 1918 – BULLECOURT

The Battalion relieved the 2/5th Batt. The Lincoln Regiment in the BULLECOURT sector. Relief complete 9pm.

21st March 1918 – BULLECOURT

5.00

Enemy opened exceptionally heavy barrage on the front support and Reserve line with shells of every calibre. The enemy attacked in large numbers and broke through on the right flank of the Battalion and reached to HOGS BACK completely cutting off the Battalion. Casualties Killed Officers Lieut. Col. T.B.H THORNE, Other Ranks 3.

Wounded Officers Capt. F.E. FOLEY other ranks 8, Missing Major D.J.E.KEATINGE, Capt's. C.W.SMITH, N.St.C.PALMER, G.A.DAPIS, D.P.TORRENS, Lieut's. O.L.PAGET, G.RATHBONE, H.R.SMITH, 2/Lieuts. J.PAXTON, P.J.RYAN, A.L.SALTER, J.C.V.JENNINGS, A.C.IRVING, P.H.BATCHELOR, S.P.HUDSON, E.M.COPE, J.S.COLBOURNE, S.G.HOWE, A.T.GREENE, C.W.FELLOWES, W.N.PRICE, R.HEATON. OTHER RANKS 586.

2/LIEUT A.E.STEARN and 2/LIEUT. S.BURTON-SMITH collected a party of men from transport lines and reported to Major H.M.C.CURTIS DSO 2/6TH Batt. South Staffs Reg't who formed a composite Battalion. This Battalion held the line at MORY EAST. Capt. D.C.B.COTES assumed command of the Battalion.

18.40

Q.M.Stores details and transport lines moved by march route to COURCELLES-LES-COMTE.

22nd March 1918 - 1.00

Q.M.Stores Details and transport lines moved by march points to DOUCHY. Capt. D.C.COTES evacuated to Hospital – 2/Lieut. J.MURPHY assumed command of the Battalion.

23rd March 1918 – 9.00

The Battalion moved by route march to BOUZINCOURT

25TH March 1918 – 2.15

The Battalion moved by march route to BEAUCOURT

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Extract from Military Records

One can see from the records below that the father couldn't write on this form, the sub post mistress Eleanor Barker had to sign his mark X. Note also that this form states that Ben's mother is dead and it shows that he had one brother and two sisters. The 1911 census showed one sister only and two boarders.

Army Form W. 5090.

To be filled in by
Officer in Charge of
Records.

Regiment **NORTH STAFFORDS REGT.**
31888 Pte. A. B. Cassell deceased

STATEMENT of the Names and Addresses of all the Relatives of the above-named deceased Soldier in each of the degrees specified below that are now living.

NOTE.—Against those degrees of relationship in which there is no relative now living the word "none" is to be inserted. If the answers are not filled in, much correspondence and delay may be occasioned by the neglect.

Degree of relationship	NAME IN FULL of every relative now living in each degree enquired for (see note above).	ADDRESS IN FULL of each surviving relative opposite his or her name.
Widow of the Soldier ...	—	—
Children of the Soldier and dates of their births...	—	—
Father of the Soldier ...	Albert Cassell	Double Lix. Hopton
Mother of the Soldier ...	Dead	—
Brothers of the Soldier	Full Blood ... one	35. Jack Royd Lane Hopton
	Half blood ...	—
Sisters of the Soldier	Full blood ... two	29 Cottage Row. Hopton 24 Double Lix. Hopton
	Half blood ...	—

If no Relatives in the degrees above are now living the following particulars should be given:—

	Names of those now living.	Addresses in full.
Grandparents of the Soldier ...	—	—
Nephews and Nieces of the Soldier ...	—	—
Uncles and Aunts by blood of the Soldier (not Uncles and Aunts by marriage) ...	—	—

DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that the above is a true and complete Statement of all the Relatives of the late Soldier now living in the degrees enquired for.

Relationship to the Soldier **Father** Signature of the Declarant **Albert Cassell** *his mark*

Address in full **Double Lix. Hopton**

I hereby certify that the above Statement and Declaration made by **Albert Cassell** and signed in my presence is complete and correct, to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Dated at **Hopton** this **23** day of **April** 19**18**

Signature of Minister or Magistrate **Eleanor Barker** Qualification **Sub Post Mistress**
Address **Hopton**

227. W. 5532/GP/114. 1,000,000/5/7. 2/18. S.O. P. 114.

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Ben's Medal Card

Names.		Corps.	Rank.	Regt. No.
CASS ELL		N Staff R	Pte	31888
Ben				

Medal.	Folio.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	F/104B9 987		
BRITISH	No.		
STAR			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

K. 1380

Correspondence.

Address.

E 1995. (1246) W4, W 2884—R.P. 6267 1,000m. 17/12/27. E. 6988.

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Ben's Medals



British War Medal



Victory Medal

Arras Memorial

The Arras Memorial commemorates 34,795 servicemen from the United Kingdom, South Africa and New Zealand who died from the spring of 1916 until 7th August 1918, and who have no known grave. Most of the casualties commemorated here were killed during the Allied offensive during the Battles of Arras in April and May 1917 and during the German attack on the Allied Front from 21st March 1918.

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