

GREAT WAR STAINED GLASS WINDOW MEMORIALS IN KENT

No. 11: Ivy Hatch Mission Church, Sevenoaks

Captain Arthur Felix Wedgwood

1/5th North Staffordshire Regiment TF

KIA 14 March 1917, Rattemoy Graben [Trench], Burquoy, Pas de Calais

Window: Ivy Hatch Mission Church, Sevenoaks

Kent links: Residence

Medals: British and Victory medals

War Grave: Rossignol Wood Cemetery, Hébuterne



Captain Arthur Felix Wedgwood
Source: *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 24 March 1917



Captain Arthur Felix Wedgwood
Source: Walter Meakin, *The Fifth North Staffords* (1920)

Arthur Felix Wedgwood was born on 18 July 1877 in Barleston, Staffordshire and was baptised in the parish church of St John the Baptist on 2 September. His father Clement was part of the famous Wedgwood pottery dynasty and a Master Potter.¹ His mother was Emily Catherine née Rendel, the daughter of an engineer. Felix Wedgwood was the fifth son, four of

¹ Clement Wedgwood died in 1889, leaving more than £60,000. Probate Records, Ancestry.Co.

whom survived childhood. All survivors were to have military careers. Eldest brother Frank fought in South Africa and was a Major in the North Staffordshire Regiment's militia, serving in the Recruiting Service during the Great War. Josiah, a Liberal (and later Labour) MP, served with the RNVR in Gallipoli, was wounded and received the DSO. Ralph, later a baronet, was given the rank of Brigadier-General when appointed Director of Docks in October 1916. His daughter was the historian Veronica Wedgwood.² A cousin, Cecil, was to be killed serving in the 8th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment in 1916. There were thus strong family links with the North Staffordshire Regiment.

Felix Wedgwood was educated at Newcastle-under-Lyme High School; Clifton College, Gloucestershire; and Trinity College, Cambridge.³ He became a civil engineer and between 1905 and 1908 travelled in the Americas, where he took up mountaineering. He suffered frostbite on Mt Aconcagua, the highest mountain in Argentina, and in 1908 successfully reached the top of Mt Assiniboine in British Columbia.⁴ It was during an Alpine Club camp in Canada that Wedgwood met his future wife, Katherine Longstaff, who was travelling with her brother Tom.⁵ The children of a wealthy chemicals merchant, who had also been Lt-Colonel of the 1st East Yorkshire Volunteers, they were visiting from England and were both enthusiastic climbers, with Tom well known for his prowess. In 1910 they were the first to reach the top of what came to be called, from 1918, Wedgwood Peak, in honour of Felix.⁶ As far as is known, Wedgwood is the only officer with links to Kent killed in the war who was memorialized in such a way.

By this time Wedgwood had returned to England, for on 5 March 1909 he was commissioned into the 5th North Staffordshire Regiment as a 2nd Lieutenant.⁷ This was a Territorial battalion newly formed after Lord Haldane's reorganization of the home defence forces the year before. The Territorials, a combination of the old Yeomanry and Volunteers, were part-time units, with regular drill meetings and an annual summer camp. The battalions were affiliated with regular county regiments and were numbered consecutively after the regular and Special Reserve battalions. The 5th North Staffordshire unit was based in Stoke-on-Trent (the six towns of Burslem, Stoke, Hanley, Fenton, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Longton) and replaced the 1st Volunteer Battalion of the North Staffordshire Regiment.⁸

Wedgwood remained with the battalion for nearly two years before resigning his commission on 15 February 1911. He probably took this step because of his impending marriage to Katherine, which took place at St Mary's Wimbledon on 20 April.⁹ The couple were to have three children. In the marriage register Wedgwood had declared his occupation to be civil engineer, but he had already begun to make his name as a novelist. In 1910, using his experience of South America, he had published an adventure novel called *The Shadow of a Titan*. In it a young Cambridge undergraduate from Staffordshire, after many adventures, overthrows the evil dictator of 'Bolumbia'. It was, perhaps surprisingly, very successful, with the print run extended twice in a matter of months. A reviewer in *The Morning Post* called it 'a story so remarkable as to place [Wedgwood] at a bound beside our leading novelists'.¹⁰ In *The Globe* it was seen as 'a great story. The work of a man of fine genius and particular gifts'

² John Bourne, 'Brigadier-General Ralph Lewis Wedgwood',

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/warstudies/research/projects/lionsdonkeys/t.aspx>

³ Service Record, Arthur Felix Wedgwood, TNA PRO WO 374/72867.

⁴ *The Times*, 21 March 1917.

⁵ E.J. Hart, *Jimmy Simpson: Legend of the Rockies* (Vancouver 2009), pp.48-9.

⁶ <http://www.peakfinder.com/peakfinder.asp?Peakname=Wedgwood+Peak>.

⁷ *London Gazette*, 18 May 1909, p.3765.

⁸ Alan MacDonald, *A Lack of Offensive Spirit? The 46th (North Midland) Division at Gommecourt, 1st July 1916* (n.p. 2008), p.8; Ray Westlake, *The Territorials 1908-1914: A Guide for Military and Family Historians* (Barnsley 2011), p.246.

⁹ Surrey, England, Church of England Marriages, 1754-1937, Wimbledon, St Mary, Ancestry. Co.

¹⁰ Quoted in *The London Telegraph and Courier*, 17 June 1910.

¹¹ Less impressed was the reviewer in the *Belfast News-Letter*. It was too ‘prosy’ and too ‘long-winded’. Despite a number of love interests, ‘the characters are too uninteresting to incite much enthusiasm’.¹² This was to be Wedgwood’s only published novel, although his wife was to publish some of his unfinished work after his death.

Within three months of his marriage Wedgwood was recommissioned into the 5th Battalion, presumably once his honeymoon was over. This time he described himself as an author. In October 1913 he was promoted to Lieutenant, in which rank he was still serving when war broke out.¹³ The battalion, now the 1/5th following the raising of a second line, became part of 137th Brigade, 46th (North Midland) Division.¹⁴ Training took place mainly near Luton and Saffron Walden.¹⁵ The Division was thought ready for overseas duty by February 1915 when it was inspected by the king.¹⁶ Although there had been numerous Territorial battalions sent to France independently during and after the great crisis at Ypres in the last months of 1914, the 46th Division was the first complete Territorial Division to join the BEF when it arrived in early March 1915.¹⁷ This may not, however, have been the accolade that it appeared at the time. In early 1915 Lord Kitchener was opposing Sir John French’s plans for major offensives on the Western Front, preferring to build up resources for the Dardanelles campaign. The 46th Division became a pawn in strategic and military politics, for when French requested that the Regular 29th Division be sent to France Kitchener refused, sending the 46th Division instead. Sending an inexperienced, partially-trained Territorial Division was ‘a clear message to Sir John that any further large-scale offensives were off the agenda for the time being’.¹⁸ The lack of preparation is confirmed by the replacement, just before going overseas, of some unfit officers of the 5th Battalion with men ‘promoted from the ranks [who] without any preliminary training, joined the officers’ mess, and had to pick up their work by experience’.¹⁹

The 46th Division spent its first few months acclimatizing to trench warfare in the line at Wulverghem, equidistant between Ypres and Armentières. It is well known that at this time the Germans had clear artillery superiority over the BEF. They were also better served with other weapons of war, with the British in the trenches having to make do and mend with a range of improvised weapons.²⁰ Wedgwood gave an interesting overview of the situation in the Wulverghem trenches in a letter home. Writing of the German use of snipers, he wrote:

Almost all the men we have had hit, have been hit from a great distance on the flanks. The Germans are artists at this game. They have steel-cored bullets, some of them 450 bore, for smashing loophole plates; they have silenced rifles, and they have air guns, which just shoot slugs. Also they have telescopic sights. Of their trench mortars luckily we have seen nothing, but we have had experience of their rifle grenades, which are deadly things, but very small and local in effect. One thing they have better than we have, and that is star-shells, which are perfectly silent,

¹¹ *The Globe*, 24 August 1910.

¹² *Belfast News-Letter*, 30 June 1910.

¹³ Service Record, Arthur Felix Wedgwood, TNA PRO WO 374/72867.

¹⁴ This was the final designation of the Brigade and Division.

¹⁵ Walter Meakin, *The Fifth North Staffords and the North Midland Territorials (1914-1919)* (Langton 1920), p.11.

¹⁶ There was already a slight family connection with royalty. Two years earlier Katherine Wedgwood had been presented at Court. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 1 March 1913.

¹⁷ Chris Baker, The Long, Long Trail, <http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/order-of-battle-of-divisions/46th-north-midland-division/>.

¹⁸ Michael Woods, ‘Gas, Grenades and Grievances: The Attack on the Hohenzollern Redoubt by 46th (North Midland) Division, 13 October 1915’, in Spencer Jones (ed), *Courage Without Glory: The British Army on the Western Front 1915* (Solihull 2015), p.410.

¹⁹ Meakin, *Fifth North Staffords*, p.13.

²⁰ Paul Strong and Sanders Marble, *Artillery in the Great War* (Barnsley 2013), p.42.

whereas ours go off with a big report. That means that if you want to see what they are doing at night, you give them fine notice, whereas if you are yourself are outside attending to wires, or patrolling between the trenches at night, the first notice you have is to see your shadow on the ground, and then down you flop.²¹

The Germans did not have it all their own way, for Wedgwood found an old trench running 60 yards into No Man's Land with a tunnel and parapet, from which the enemy trenches could be seen and a sniper positioned unobserved. On another occasion, at a distance of 500 yards Wedgwood was shown a slight gap in the enemy's parapet. The best shot in his platoon was set up with a 'synoscopic' rifle and shot two Germans as they passed the spot. On Easter Sunday two Germans got up on their parapet and waved white flags. 'The only answer they got was rapid fire all along the Line; now I hear that, today being a socialist festival on the Continent, two of them got up and waved red flags, and they were both shot by the 5th North'²²

On 22 June the battalion moved north, into the Ypres salient at Sanctuary Wood, near the small village of Hooze. Sanctuary Wood has been described as 'a melancholy, ugly place, where only the lice and the rats took up happy habitation'.²³ It was this part of the line where the Germans first experimented with new and frightening weapons of war. On 22 April they had used poison gas and on 30 July they were to attack the 1/8th Sherwood Foresters of 46th Division with flamethrowers.²⁴ By this time, however, Wedgwood was already back in Britain.

On the night of 24-25 July Wedgwood went out between the lines with his CO to inspect a mine crater. In order to see it more clearly, he fired a star-light pistol. Perhaps, as he had noted earlier, the noise attracted attention, for he was immediately shot through the wrist. The wound was not serious, but he was sent back to England, where he was to remain for more than a year.²⁵ Strangely, the battalion War Diary does not mention the incident, merely stating 'In Trenches; showers; 3 wounded, 1 accidentally wounded'.²⁶

Wedgwood was to miss two catastrophic attacks by 46th Division while he was absent. On 13 October 1915 they made a disastrous assault on the Hohenzollern Redoubt in the dark. The Official Historian wrote that: 'Pushing on most gallantly, the left leading battalion of the 137th Brigade, 1/5th North Staffordshire (Lieut-Colonel J.H. Knight, killed during the action) lost twenty officers and 485 other ranks, mostly in the first rush toward Big Willie, and was practically annihilated'.²⁷ The second disaster came at Gommecourt on 1 July 1916, the attack being a diversion for the main assault on the Somme and was a complete failure. The 1/5th

²¹ Quoted in Meakin, *Fifth North Staffords*, p.21.

²² *Ibid.*, pp.21-22. The festival was presumably May Day (May 1).

²³ MacDonald, *Lack of Offensive Spirit?*, p.33.

²⁴ The main German attack on 30 July was on the 14th Division front, to the left of 46th Division, but the 1/8th Sherwood Foresters, on the left of the Division, were heavily involved in stopping the attack. J.E. Edmonds, *Official History of the Great War: Military Operations France and Belgium 1915*, Vol. 2 (1928: reprint Uckfield n.d.), pp.103-104.

²⁵ Meakin, *Fifth North Staffords*, p.29.

²⁶ War Diary, 1/5th North Staffordshire Regiment, 25 July 1915, TNA PRO WO 95/2685. Battalion war diaries were meant to report on the activities of officers, as well as record any significant events. The 137th Brigade War Diary states that on the night of 24-25th July 'Germans shelled round about Railway Cutting (1/5th North Staffs Regt) most of night'. War Diary, 137th Brigade, 25 July 1915, TNA PRO WO 95/2683.

²⁷ Edmonds, *Official History, France, 1915*, Vol.2, pp.384-85. See also Woods, 'Gas, Grenades and Grievances', pp.426-36.

Battalion casualties were 12 officers and 207 other ranks. Maj-General the Hon. E.J.M. Stuart Wortley, GOC 46th Division paid for the debacle, possibly unfairly, with his job.²⁸

Meanwhile, Wedgwood was taking a long time to recuperate. He was not finally declared fit for general service by a medical board until September 1916, at which point he was confirmed in the rank of Captain.²⁹ For much of this time he served with the 3/5th Reserve Battalion of the regiment based in Grantham and Lincoln. There is evidence to suggest that his long period at home was not his choice. Lt-Colonel A.E. Blizzard, CO of the 3/5th Battalion, in a commiseration letter to Katherine after Wedgwood's death, wrote that 'I am very glad that I was able to keep him at home as long as I did before, in the end he applied to go out again, himself'.³⁰

The Battalion War Diary does not state when Wedgwood reported for duty, but the battalion history states that he rejoined at the end of 1916. If so, he would not have been at home when his wife gave birth to their son, Cecil, in December.³¹ The battalion was in the trenches before Monchy and was to remain there until 7 March 1917.³² It then was withdrawn for a rest and to prepare for an attack on the trenches at Bucquoy, a few miles east of Gommecourt (which the Germans had evacuated on 28 February as they began to retreat to the Hindenburg Line). It was to be a night attack on 14-15 March, with Wedgwood's C Company in the centre of the battalion assault.

There are plentiful accounts of Wedgwood's fate which, in a sense, he brought upon himself. A few days before the attack orders were given at a meeting of senior officers with Major Lister (the CO, Lt-Col A.E. Fawcus was absent at the time) that only two company commanders and two deputy company commanders (2.ic) were to take part, the choice being decided by lots. As the officers were returning to their billets they found Wedgwood to be missing. They returned to Battalion HQ to find him trying to volunteer for the attack. All the officers immediately followed suit. When the lottery did take place, Wedgwood was not selected, but he managed to persuade Fawcus to allow him to participate.³³ It was a decision that Fawcus came to regret. Wedgwood had implored him 'to let him go, and as he had an understudy returning from the 3rd Army School the following day, I consented'.³⁴

Zero hour for the attack on the German trenches was 11.50pm on 14 March, but about two hours before it was postponed until 1am. Three companies were involved, their frontages of attack being about 230 yards, with Wedgwood's C Company in the centre. There was to be no supporting barrage until Zero, when the artillery would fire for fifteen minutes with a major aim of cutting the enemy's wire. When the attack began, the battalion 'immediately advanced as if on parade up to within 20 or 30 yards of the enemy's wire'.³⁵ Within forty-five minutes Fawcus, waiting anxiously at Battalion HQ, had heard from a junior subaltern that C Company had been prevented from entering the German trenches because the wire was uncut and that Wedgwood had been killed 'on the enemy's wire'.

²⁸ The 46th Division's role at Gommecourt is covered in punctilious detail in MacDonald, *Lack of Offensive Spirit?* The part played by 137th Brigade can be found in Chapter 8.

²⁹ Service Record, Arthur Felix Wedgwood, TNA PRO WO 374/72867.

³⁰ A.E. Blizzard to Mrs Wedgwood, 21 March 1917, *In Memoriam: Arthur Felix Wedgwood*, in Imperial War Museums, Books and Publications Department, LBY BOS 234. The battalion history hints that at least some officers thought his absence was prolonged. If so, it was not at his instigation.

³¹ Cecil lived until 1996, dying twenty years after his mother.

³² Meakin, *Fifth North Staffords*, p.79.

³³ Private W. Yates (Wedgwood's servant) to Mrs Wedgwood, 25 March 1917, *In Memoriam*, Letter 1; Meakin, *Fifth North Staffords*, p.79.

³⁴ Lt-Col. A.E. Fawcus to Mrs Wedgwood, 20 March 1917, Lt-Col. A.E. Fawcus to Brig-Gen. R.L. Wedgwood, 21 March 1917, *In Memoriam*, Letters 6 and 8.

³⁵ Lt-Col. A.E.F. Fawcus, Report on Operations on Night of 13/14th March 1917, War Diary, 1/5th North Staffordshire Regiment, TNA PRO WO 95/2685.

As Director of Docks, Wedgwood's brother Ralph was stationed at the BEF's GHQ and thus was able, within a few days, to visit the battalion. He gathered all the information he could and on 21 March he wrote to his sister-in-law:

It was a night attack, and they ran up against barbed wire where all should have been clear; the Germans had machine guns posted in the trench behind. Felix was killed instantaneously at the barbed wire leading his company (the centre company); his second (Hammersley) was killed too, and another company commander (Wilton). It was a gallant attack, and the Divisional Staff told me that the North Staffs would have got through if anyone could. He died facing the enemy and cheering his men on, and no soldier could have wished for a nobler death. They buried him with six other officers in a cemetery two miles away. It lies in a hollow by a country road with a tree or two nearby and a wood not far away, past which he had marched, the evening before, with his men. The wood has a name [Rossignal, trans. Nightingale] which he may have thought of with pleasure as he sat there that night taking his last meal before the attack: and though the trees are splintered and smashed it will be green enough in the spring and be a shelter to that little graveyard in that desolate country. The graves are fenced off, and crosses will soon be put up at the grave heads. I will go again there later and see that all is nicely kept.³⁶

Fawcus told Katherine that her husband 'was actually killed while striving to cut a gap [in the wire] for his men to get through'. A later account of his death claims that Wedgwood drew fire to himself and away from his men by taking responsibility for cutting the wire.³⁷ It being a dark night may suggest some exaggeration here, but the battalion history does mention that in 1915, when out on a wiring party at night, Wedgwood 'walked along the front some distance and rattled the barbed wire with his stick' when a German machine gun began firing.³⁸ Such selfless behaviour was expected of British officers, of course, which partly explains why, proportionately, more were killed than Other Ranks during the war. Wedgwood was clearly a brave man and it is noticeable that not only did his servant write a letter of condolence to his widow, but so too did three former men of the battalion who, now back home in Stoke, believed that 'the life [in France] was only made possible by his courage, courtesy and gentle kindness ... his example inspired all who knew him'.³⁹

Rossignal Wood is one of a number of small cemeteries in the Hébuterne area. It contains the remains of 111 soldiers, 41 British and New Zealanders and 70 German. The New Zealanders were buried in August 1918, while the Germans were brought in from the surrounding area after the war.⁴⁰ When the permanent headstones were erected in the cemetery, Katherine had inscribed on her husband's, *Until the Day break and the shadows flee away* (Song of Solomon II.17). At one level this is a simple statement of her confidence that they will meet again (life in the trenches apparently strengthened Wedgwood's belief in the existence of life after death).⁴¹ But it is also part of one of history's great love songs, sung by Solomon's betrothed eagerly awaiting marriage, which, with its reference to mountains and hills, is particularly apposite to the Wedgwoods' relationship:

*Listen! My beloved!
Behold, he is coming,*

³⁶ Brig-Gen. R.L. Wedgwood to Mrs Wedgwood, 21 March 1917, *In Memoriam*, Letter 5.

³⁷ *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 19 March 1926.

³⁸ Meakin, *Fifth North Staffords*, p.29.

³⁹ Alf. W Bennett, E.J. Gibson, H. Steventon to Mrs Wedgwood, 22 March 1917, *In Memoriam*, Letter 4.

⁴⁰ Information from Commonwealth War Graves Commission website.

⁴¹ For Wedgwood and trench life, see *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 19 March 1926.

*Climbing on the mountains,
Leaping on the hills!*

...

*Until the Day break and the shadows flee away,
Turn my beloved, be then like a roe
Or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.*⁴²

The memorial window dedicated to Wedgwood was unveiled on the ninth anniversary of his death, in the small mission church at Ivy Hatch, near Sevenoaks. Katherine was living nearby, at The Grange in Ightham. Little is known of the mission church (see Fig. 1), except that it probably was built in 1922 and is no longer consecrated. The memorial window has disappeared and there is no image of it. Newspaper reports of its dedication, however, give some general details. It represented the Resurrection, with two inscriptions, both from Luke XXIX: 5 and 6: *Why seek ye the living among the dead?* and *He is not here, but risen*. Its theme thus continues the war grave inscription. The dedication at the bottom was: *To the Glory of God and in memory of Arthur Felix Wedgwood, Killed in Action March 14th 1917*. There appears to have been no mention of Wedgwood's regiment or any visual representation of a military character. His war service was, of course, mentioned in the address given by the Rural Dean of Shoreham, Rev. F.W. Warland, although the details were muddled at times. Wedgwood's young son Cecil unveiled the window, a poignant reminder that he would never know a father whom he never saw.⁴³

⁴² For the implicit sexual imagery of the song, see <http://www.lavistachurchofchrist.org/LVstudies/SongOfSolomon/06Spring.htm>.

⁴³ *Sevenoaks Chronicle and Kentish Advertiser*, 19 March 1926; *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 19 March 1926.



Fig. 1: Ivy Hatch Mission Church, Sevenoaks
Source: Ightham History Project

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