If I should die think only this of me
That there’s a foreign field that is forever England
There shall be beneath that rich earth a richer dust concealed

Rupert Brook
The Soldier.
Chance Discovery

This is the story of two soldiers who died in the First World War. In life it is doubtful whether they ever met but fate, time and chance discovery joined them in death. One soldier died in the first year of the war and one in the last year. Both were sons of Gloucestershire.

For a number of years I had visited the battlefields of Northern France and Belgium with no particular interest in any specific place. The main reason for some of these visits was the fact that one of my nephews was researching World War One soldiers who had died in action and who had originated from the village of Apperley in Gloucestershire. Every so often he would need to take photographs or seek specific details of certain locations thus generating the need for a visit. Eventually he wrote his book and the easy access to weekends in France or Belgium for my brother-in-law and myself was greatly reduced.

We were not without direct connection to events in World War 1 from a family point of view as both of us had relatives who had been participants. My uncle had died of illness during his service with the Gloucestershire Regiment during that period and is in fact buried in a military grave in Tredworth Old Cemetery. In addition two of my mother’s cousins had fought with the Canadian Army. On the other side of the family my mother-in-law’s uncle was a leading stoker on HMS Queen Mary who went down with his ship, and her father was a regular soldier invalided out after fighting in the Battle of the Somme. He was first shot and seriously wounded while fighting in the Khyber Pass and shot again in the Somme offensive. The Khyber Pass bullet was not recovered at the time but was however found during chest surgery following the Somme. It turned out that the Khyber Pass bullet was found to be made of wood, thus its elusiveness. (Another interesting tale).

The story of the lost soldiers began as a result of a request by my late sister for me to carry out research into our family history. As a family we were fairly insular and had few close relatives. Like most families we were aware of basic family roots, grandparents, aunts and uncles etc. but information was fairly sparse and rarely discussed. As my sister and I were the last in our family direct line I finally agreed to give it a go before it became too late. At the same time I also obtained two carrier bags full of old photos and odd documents from my wife’s side of the family so I decided to research both families more or less at the same time.
I purchased a standard family history package, put it onto my computer and then sat back to consider where to start. The main sources of family history information available at this time were the County Records Office with its enormous quantity of microfiche and the General Registry Office in London with its births, deaths and marriage registers and the National Archives at Kew. There were very few digitised records available unlike the many commercial organisations that are available today. The 1901 census was some way from completion but I did obtain a digitised copy of the 1881 census for Great Britain produced by the Mormon Church and soon afterwards an early copy of the 1951 Census for Gloucestershire.

Even as a novice family historian I knew that the starting point for both families was to gather together all of the documentation such as photos, birth certificates etc. available and to begin plotting a basic family tree. All began quite well and before long the basic tree took on quite a reasonable shape. Then amongst the odd documents such as old receipts, school reports, Sunday School certificates and such like items from my side of the family I discovered two unusual documents. A letter and a letter card, both written in 1914 and both from a World War One soldier on active service. The soldier’s name was Charles George Price.

The letter, dated 4th October 1914, was addressed to the soldier’s mother, and the letter card dated 18th October 1914 was addressed to his sister. The name Price did not mean anything to me at that time, but the address of the soldier’s sister did. It was my Aunt Clara’s old address, the house where my father was born and also the house in which my grandparent’s had lived. Both of my grandparents had died many years before I was born.

I then began to realise that the answer lay in the detail of my father’s family. My grandfather and grandmother had both been married prior to the marriage that produced our side of the family, their respective spouses having died. I knew my grandmother’s maiden name had been Roper but up until that time I did not know that her first married name was Price. When I knew them, both my Aunt Clara and Aunt Millie obviously used their married surnames. I now realised that the Miss M Price was in fact my Aunt Millie. The soldier’s mother was my grandmother and Charles George Price was my father’s step brother. George must have had a special meaning to my grandmother as my father’s name was Baden George and mine Douglas George. So Charles was an uncle I knew nothing about and I could not even recall him being mentioned in any family conversations I was privy to.

As previously stated I had been a novice student of World War 1 and had visited the battle fields of Northern France and Belgium on a number of occasions. So the finding of these two letters was a fascinating event for me and suddenly drew a link with a period of time for which I had a long established interest.
The letter dated 4th. October 1914

The strange thing was that the letter was a type written copy of a letter written on 4th, October 1914 and certified by a H.V. Salmon for the Assistant Finance Secretary, War Office dated 17th. December 1915.
My Dear Mother

Just a line to let you know that I am in the best of health but have had some trying times marching and fighting & etc., it is not at all pleasant of course. I cannot tell much in this letter but if you read the account of the war from Aug 23rd, the retirement from Mons you will see what we had to put up with but the tide has turned. We are driving the enemy back but it is very slow work and thousands killed of course. You will know that you will read more in the newspapers than I can tell you. Dear Mother I must not put any address on my letter but you know my Regt. So write to the same place as you did in the last letter and put Active Service on the bottom. Harry ought to know how to address it.

I have been expecting a letter from you every day but not one has come since Aug. 15 everybody gets a letter bar poor little Wagg, please hurry up and write. I have sent several p.c. to you. Of course I don’t always get chance to write Dear Mother.

How is Dad going on? I hope he is better. Is Dad going back to work yet? Of course I can’t send anything I have not drawn any money since leaving England, it would be no good if I had any I can’t spend it. Dear Mother if you can would you mind sending me a few fags? Remember me to Aunt Emma. Harry, Jack, Annie and all at home.

We have lost a lot of men of our regiment, We have been in the thick of it I have thought it was all up on more than one occasion. Well Mother if anything happens to me you can have all that is due to me but I hope to come home again and tell you all about the war that I have taken part in. Well good night and God bless you all.

Charles XXXXX

Certified by H.V. Salmon

For the Assistant War Secretary
War Office
The second letter was written in pencil on a letter card and posted in Southampton on October 20th, 1914. The letter was dated 18th October 1914.
Miss M Price
22 Worrel Street
Kingsholm,
Gloucester

L/Cpl. C Price
707984 A Coy
1st. Glo’ster Regt.
British Expeditionary Force

Sunday

Write back soon please.

My Dear Sister,

Just a few lines to you and all at home. I have sent this letter home by a Comrade who is invalided home so that I shall be able to tell you about the part of the war that I am taking place in.

We landed in France on the 13th August and marched to Belgium where I took part in the battle of Mons on Sunday August 23rd. Then I fought in the great retreat back almost to Paris but in the meantime August 26th, a day I shan’t ever forget, it was a place called Cambrai. I thought it was all up, it was hell upon earth. The shells were flying around us killing and wounding I don’t know how many but of course the Germans (words seem to be missing here) action.

Never mind I hope to be home sometime. If I get time I will give you all the details of the war. Of course I am not allowed to write anything from here but as I sent this home I thought I would give a little idea where I had been so that you can read the papers and see how it is going on.

I have just left the Battle of Aisne where we were shelled for 3 or 4 days and nights without a break. We stayed for 14 days and nights in the trenches before we got relieved. We are having it cold out here, now I am off to Belgium again today.

Dear sister remember me to all at home & Aunt Emma & Jack. I hope you are all enjoying the best of health as it leaves me middling. So goodnight and God bless you all,

Charles XXXX.

Were next?
I was then faced with the question of where do I go from here? I then thought that as I had not been aware of Charles’s existence or heard speak of him he may not only been involved in the great war but may also have been a victim of it. In other words killed in action.
I had used the War Graves Commission site on a number of occasions so that was the place to visit next. Following input of the basic information I had the answer.

This information began to provide certain key facts. Firstly the letter of the 18th October was written only 13 days before his death and secondly Charles had no known grave. It also gave me the answer to the type written letter and the certification
by the War office. In that letter Charles had stated “Well mother if anything happens to me” The letter had become his last will and testament.

If Charles had the usual soldier’s will, it remained with him where he rested. As he was a single man my grandmother had obviously made a claim to the army using the letter as proof of entitlement. Extra in formation from the WGC record was that the rank and army number suggested that he was a regular soldier before the war had started.

The next step was to carry out a further search through family items for anything related to World War One which could be linked to Charles Price. Three particular items turned up:-

1. A brass front cap badge (the Glosters having a back badge as well) that I knew was always kept with my father’s effects in my parents dressing table. My father had served for 12 years in the Gloucester Regiment following WW1. His cap badge, which I still have, was silver plated. The brass front badge was also well worn.

2. A remembrance book dedicated to the employees of the Midland Railway Company who gave their lives in the First World War.


I could remember each of these items but had never given them more that a cursory glance.

Firstly I considered the cap badge and soon came to the conclusion that it must have been Charles’s as it was an early badge. It looked like it had seen some service and obviously was of importance for it to be kept with my father’s other treasures in his dressing table drawer. It was the kind of item a soldier might give to his younger brother. (My father also kept his own silver cap badge in the same drawer).

My father’s back badge was very precious to him and he always wore it in the lapel of his “best suit” up until his death in 1964.
Next I checked the remembrance book and sure enough on page 47 was a C. Price recorded as a Lance Corporal in the Gloucestershire Regiment. He had been a labourer in the Ways & Works Department in Gloucester.

Charlie’s name first on the list.
Lastly I looked at the book of photographs. There were no detailed captions only names of company commanders and individual companies. I also thought that if Charles was 23 years old in 1914 then he was far too young to be in the army in 1905. Was this book my father’s or was it to do with Charles? I then decided to look more closely at the Price family. Up until now I had only looked briefly as I had been researching the main family using the ponderous microfiche system.

After a few hours in the Gloucestershire Records Office I had pieced together an outline of my grandmother’s first family. Her first husband was a John Henry Price. As far as I could tell she had five children John, Charles born about 1886 Edith, Millica and Clara. Millie and Clara I knew but of the other three I knew nothing.

It also told me that Charles’s age on the War Graves Commission site was incorrect. Also that most likely this coupled with the rank and army number meant the photo album had been compiled when he was stationed in India with the Gloucestershire Regiment. I now knew that I had a photograph of Charles but had no way of recognising him.

I finally checked to see if his service record was obtainable from the National Archives at Kew. This however, even today, is a bit of a lottery because some 66% of the service records for 1914 to 1920 were burnt after a 1940 German air raid had hit the then record office. Most of the remaining records known as the “burnt records” were available at that time but were in the final process of being digitised.
Unfortunately Charlie’s records were destroyed and lost forever. There are two million un-burnt records mainly relating to those soldiers qualifying for pensions or soldiers discharged as unfit.

The Road to Gheluvelt
Having exhausted all of the ideas I had to discover what Charles looked like I decided to find out more about where he had been killed and the various battles he had been involved in since landing in France aboard the “Gloucester Castle”

The 1\textsuperscript{st}. Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment formed part of the Third brigade of the First Division of The British Expeditionary Force. The Third Brigade comprised 1\textsuperscript{st}. Glo’sters, The Welch Regiment, The South Wales Borderers, The Queens Regiment, The 26\textsuperscript{th}. Field Company Royal Engineers and the 43\textsuperscript{rd}. Brigade Royal Field Artillery.

By studying the many records and extracts from the Gloucestershire Regiment War Diaries etc., I began to put together the series of events that that Charles had experienced from the time he landed. To the time of his death on the 31\textsuperscript{st}. October 1914 near the village of Gheluvelt in Belgium.

All the official documents supported the dialogue recorded in Charles two letters but they could not provide that tinge of fear and foreboding intimated in those very personal documents.

On the 18\textsuperscript{th}. October following the battle of the Aisne Charles’s battalion moved back to Flanders to a place called Cassel from where they marched to Longue Croix close to Poperinghe.

21\textsuperscript{st}. October the Glos’ters advanced on Langenmark where for several days they were involved in some very heavy fighting, successfully fending off repeated attacks by the enemy.

25\textsuperscript{th}. October the battalion marched to the 2km marker on the Ypres-Gheluvelt road and bivouacked for the night.

26\textsuperscript{th}. October They moved into the grounds of a chateau near Gheluvelt and then moved to a line of trenched on the Ypres-Menin road near Vindhoek.

28\textsuperscript{th}. October they remained near Veldhoek suffering further shelling while at the same time providing support with their machine gun section to other battalions such as the Coldstream Guards.

29\textsuperscript{th}. October the Glosters were ordered to advance to the east to check the advance of the Germans who had attacked the nearby village of Gheluvelt.

From a strategic point of view the villages of Gheluvelt and Veldhoek were extremely important, as they sat either side of the entrance to a strip of land known as the Ypres.
Ridge. Whoever held this ridge not only commanded a good view of surrounding countryside but also held the doorway to Ypres. If this position fell the enemy would march straight into Ypres itself. Much of this fighting took place in thick mist. Later the Battalion returned to defensive trenches to reorganise. To give some idea of the causalities suffered at this time one source of information stated that on one particular day “in a confused severe action the battalion lost 3 officers 14 NCOs and 42 men killed”.

30th October after a reasonably quiet night the enemy attacked Zandvoorde with fresh troops. Heavy shelling continued to take its toll on the Glo’sters who by the end of the day entrenched in hastily dug rifle pits on the North side of the Menin Road in front of Veldhoek.

Saturday 31st October 1914
On the 31st October troops awoke to mist and light rain. Most of the night up until 2 am had been moonlit and the Glosters had been subjected to continuous shelling and sniping by the Germans. At about 10am the mist cleared. Primarily the Germans used observation balloons to spot positions of the defending British Expeditionary Force. They were described by an English observer at the time as being “tired, haggard, unshaven, unwashed, plastered with mud, many being dressed in no more than rags”. However they had their guns, rifles, plenty of ammunition and a determination to defend the gateway to Ypres. This line of defence could also be seen as even greater in stature as in a way it stood between the British Empire and ruin. It was that important.
As Zandvoorde had been captured on the previous day the Germans could attack from the South East. The Glo’sters were deployed in hastily dug rifle pits on the North side of the Ypres to Menin road in front of Veldhoek some quarter of a mile South of Gheluvelt. Their task was to provide escort to the 34th Brigade Royal Field Artillery. The Headquarters Party was also situated in the same area.
At 9-30am 60 men of the Welch Regiment fell back from the defensive position at Gheluvelt to join up with the Glosters. In response Major General Landon sent 80 Glo’sters forward. The group worked its way forward around Gheluvelt by a northern route but by the time they reached the front line they had been reduced to around 30. Finally the Germans broke through and took the village of Gheluvelt everyone on the British side falling back to rear-guard positions. By 11.30 am the Germans fully occupied the village.

Three companies of the Glo’sters along with the Welch, South Wales Borderers and The Queens Battalion were sent forward to rally a counter attack but this was of no avail so Major General Langdon ordered the troops back to their original positions. Around this time the Head Quarters position was hit and Lt. Colonel Lovatt of the Glo’sters who had been second in command now took over command of the 3rd Brigade.

While the Germans were celebrating their victory the Second Worcestershire Battalion mounted a counter attack and after some very heavy and skilful fighting retook Gheluvelt and by 2.30 it was back in British hands. At the same time as the counter attack a large detachment of Germans had advanced down the Menin road westwards towards Ypres. However the entrenched Glo’sters, Welch and Queens etc. were too strong for them to take and they were quickly repulsed. The Germans finally retreated back towards Gheluvelt in disarray followed by some of the defenders.

A German officer later reported that their advance had been halted by a by a “new fortress” that had been constructed at the side of the Menin Road. In fact new shallow trenches had been hurriedly dug with basic entrenching tools without any barbed wire or other reinforcement. The regiment had lost a further sixty men and Charles Price was amongst them on that fateful day.

The Glo’sters were finally relieved to Inverness Copse located in Heronthage Wood. The battalion could now barely muster 300 men from the original 800. From an importance and strategic point of view this battle was described as the most critical day in the first battle of Ypres and one which would be recorded as a superb feat of arms.

Ypres and the surrounding area.

During the time I was researching the activities of the Glo’sters, from their landing in France up until the battle at Gheluvelt, I was able to visit Belgium and the sites of the various events and see things in a new light.

The soldiers listed on the Menin Gate memorial all died in the various battles for Ypres. They were all men with no known graves. This did not necessarily mean to say that they still lay where they had fallen as there are many graves with no name on the headstone. They are “Known unto God”. However the majority of soldiers listed on the Menin Gate Memorial still rest where they died.
During my next visit to Ypres I was able to locate Charles’s name on the Menin Gate Memorial. Apart from the period of the German occupation during WW2, each night since the end of the First World War a bugler plays The Last Post. On special occasions more than one bugler attends. As this was one of those special occasions the Last Post was performed by six buglers rather than the usual one. This made the event even more special to me. The various locations that I had visited on the many previous occasions suddenly became more poignant as I was now building up a relationship with someone who had been there, in fact in a way he was still there.

![Charles’s name on the Menin Memorial](image)

I stood in the countryside just outside Gheluvelt early one morning when the sun was just burning the mist from the fields and felt as if I could almost reach out and touch those soldiers of all nations who had fought and died in those fields.

There are one or two marvellous war museums in the area and when I looked at the artefacts at sites such as Sanctuary Wood, I wondered how many may have been seen or touched by one of those “Glorious Glo’sters” of 1914.

There is a British Military cemetery at Zandvoorde just south east of Gheluvelt where there are a number of graves of unknown soldiers of the Gloucestershire Regiment. I remember pausing there and wondering if Charles was one of them. It is quite possible he could have been buried there within sight of Gheluvelt itself.

Charles’s grave may have been well constructed and clearly marked in October 1914. However it was at least four or five years later that the fallen were being located and buried properly. Early dog tags were not very durable and often disintegrated. A body could easily have been recovered and only identified by regimental insignia.
Making contact with the past

I still had no idea as to what Charles looked like. I studied pictures of my grandmother, my father and his sisters in the hope that I could identify a soldier somewhere in the Gloucestershire Regimental Indian photographs. I have since discovered that there is a good source in the form of a contemporary magazine called the Cheltenham and Gloucester Graphic. This paper printed pictures of most of the local area soldiers who were killed or wounded in the war. However hindsight is a wonderful thing and I did not know this at that time.

I now realised that I had to make a special effort in the hope of moving forward. As a child I often accompanied my parents to visit my aunts Millie and Clara. I always remember the love and affection shown to my father by his two stepsisters and in return I saw how fond he was of them. I think that they played an important part in his growing up and this had forged a special bond between them. Aunt Clara and Uncle Tom and Clara had two daughters Pansy and Poppy. Aunt Clara lived in the old...
family house up until the time Clapham was redeveloped in the fifties so the chances were she may have kept some family documents etc.

Obviously Aunt Clara, Uncle Tom and Aunt Millie had long since died but I knew both Poppy and Pansy still lived in the Gloucester area although the last time we had met must have been at least fifty or so years ago. Luckily one of my nieces knew someone who knew someone who was a friend of Pansy’s. I wrote a letter and following a short telephone conversation we were back in touch. I explained about finding the letters and the mystery of the unknown soldier and what I had found so far. In return she said she was more than happy to help. Pansy told me that when aunt Clara died they had found a box with all manner of documents, photos etc., and that I was welcome to borrow it to see if it would help me. I had now achieved a bonus in that I had made contact with my two cousins and their husbands and experienced that regret we all must feel when we realise that we have neglected keeping in contact with someone important to our lives.

Revelation

The box was an absolute treasure trove of not only those things related to Charles Price but to my father’s side of the family whom I knew very little about. There were wedding certificates, death certificates, letters, postcards and family photographs showing people that I had never heard of or seen before. Post cards my father sent to my grandmother following his enlistment into the army and even an exercise book that my father must have been issued with and used at the beginning of his military service. Then there were the items relative to Charles Price and his life prior to and after his death in 1914. Souvenirs from India that he may have given to his family or just left behind, Most of all his medals and Death Plaque sent to his mother following the end of the war.

My grandparents were married in 1901 and my father was born in 1902. At the time of their marriage my grandfather was a 54 year old widower and my grandmother was a 35 year old widow and Charles was about 15 years of age. My grandfather was a journeyman plasterer employed at Gloucester Cathedral where he worked on decorative plaster work and figurines etc. According to family knowledge my grandfather was not the easiest person to get along with and I wondered whether this was one reason why Charles enlisted. However they may have had a perfectly good relationship as in his letters from the front Charles does ask how “dad” is and refers to him as “dear old dad” when he hears of my grandfather’s death.
Edith and William Gardner
Baden George Gardner (6 Months)
William and Edith had one other surviving child from their marriage, Annie Sophia Gardner. She died quite young a number of years before I was born. Again I knew very little of her.

My grandmother with her first husband John Price.

John and Edith had four other children beside Charles, John born circa 1884, Edith Clare born circa 1892, Milica Annie born circa 1894 and Clara Winifred born circa 1897. I knew aunts Millie and Clara as we visited them quite often throughout my childhood. I knew nothing of John or Edith.
Enlisting in the Army.

One of the first documents that I looked at was Charles’s “Army Small Book”. This acted as a record of his personal details and subsequently a record of his army service.

Pages taken from Charles’s Army Small Book giving details of his physique and his personal details. He joined the army on the 28.6.1905 at the age of just under nineteen. He signed up for nine years in the regular army and 3 years as a reserve. At the time of joining the army he stated his occupation as being a “coal heaver”.

The following photograph must have been taken shortly after his enlistment and most likely at Aldershot. Charlie is in the front row first on the left. I have a similar photograph showing my own father in a similar situation. It is quite surprising how alike they were. An interesting point is the caps that the three recruits in the back row are wearing. These were issued to the British army for a short period around 1902 until around 1907. The official name given to the hat was “Forage Cap” They were also known as “Broderick” caps, named after the minister of defence at that time who thought them a suitable design.
Charles left front row and fellow recruits not long after joining up.

The above is the outside cover of the Gloucestershire Regimental Book that had stood gathering dust for years. Now that I knew what Charles looked like I could identify him during his time in India.
A picture taken in India Charles is middle of second row down

Charles and comrade in a loose photo. Typical photo taken in civilian studio. The friend is to Charles’s left in previous picture taken from the official Indian Album.
Charles like many young men of his time probably had very little formal education. This certificate shows that he began to take the opportunity to turn that around. To undertake a corporal’s duties it was necessarit to hold this level of qualification.

The inside of a Christmas card that Charles sent to his family from India.
Another photo taken from the Gloucestershire Regimental book showing H Company commanded by Captain J. R. Wethered. Charles is third row down fourth from left.

Below Charles front row second from right now sporting a moustache and a good conduct stripe on his right sleeve.
This is a post card sent to 7984 Pte. Price, Cambridge Barracks, Portsmouth. Dated 8 September 1911

On examination there seems to be two messages written on the same card. One reads:-

Dear Chums,
I am going on alright. Just a few lines in advance of leave. Glad to hear Jack on track. Tell Jones not to take my overcoat to mothers CS said so.
Harry.
(Harry Stokes was Charles brother-in-law and he was also a Sergeant Major in the Glo’sters.)
The other message is written between the lines of the first:-

Coming on 13 Wednesday get my kit out and put it in the same place. I will try and send the overcoat in by someone No.4 Rapid fire get ready to rush.

From the date on the above card I would think that this is the time around which Charles would have left the army and started working for the Midland Railway Company.

Recalled to the Regiment
The next item chronologically seems to be a photograph showing a much more mature Charlie outside a Bell Tent. Each soldier seems to be kitted out with a SMLE rifle suggesting a war like atmosphere.

Charles is in the back row second from left.

France and Belgium September 1914.

Mixed in with the various photographs, documents and other items were a number of letter cards and post cards that filled in the communication gap from Charles’s landing in France, the letters of the 4th and 18th. October and the time up until Gheluvelt.

The first communication that Charlie sends home is a letter card written on the 20th, September just before the battalion move into the Avesnes –Landreccies area.
This card is addressed to Charlie’s mother and is one that has been borrowed from someone else in the unit.
The original address on the card is one in Shurdington near Cheltenham but this has been crossed out. There is no stamp but a note to say that stamps weren’t available.

Card addressed to Charles’s mother and crammed with writing in every available space

Postmark 24th September 1914. Army Censor Stamp No. 196

Dated 20th September 1914.

My Dear Mother,

Just a line to let you know that I am alright but we are having an awful time of it and the weather awfully wet. I am very pleased the war is not in England there is no homes at all here. Dear mother write me a letter and let me know how you and the family are getting on. Address it 7984 A Company Price. Active Service
and then it will come straight out to me, waste no time. If I live to get home I will tell all about the war and all the goings on.
Dear mother if you can would you send me a few fags and a few bars of plain chocolate and then I can make some cocoa when they stop shelling us.

From your loving son, Charles XX

There were a number of notes and post scripts scattered around in the various blank spaces:-

(i) Please save the papers.
(ii) Remember me to all the family.
(III) Dear Mother if you are short of money apply to the Prince of Wales fund. It is for mothers and wives.

October 10th, 1914
In his letter of the 4th October Charles had asked “how is Dad going on?” and “is he back at work yet?” In his letter card of 10th October he acknowledges the fact that his step-father had died. It seems that at the time of his posing the questions a letter was in the post bearing the answers.

Dear Mother, October 10th, 1914

I was sorry to hear about the death of dear old dad. Cheer up mother God knows best. I hopes this war soon comes to an end, we are having a rough time of it. I have not received the parcel yet but will let you know when I get it if I have a chance to write. Ask Shiner to write to me.
I am happy to hear to know that you are in the best of health. Of course you can read in the papers how the war is going on.
Remember me to all at home and aunt Emma.
Good night and God bless.
From Charles.
16th. October

Just to let relatives know that their loved ones were still alive the army provided a “Field Post Card”. This had no writing apart from a signature and pre-typed responses to the various clauses. These cards were especially available just after or just before serious stages in the fighting. This card along with Charles’s letter of the 18th. October was sent just as the BEF was being moved back up into Belgium.

Note how Charles signs himself “Charley Wagg”. I wonder if the censor spotted this and if he thought it a good idea. The post card was obviously not destroyed so the censor may have ignored this morsel of trench humour.

Within two days this card was followed by the letter of 18th. October, and shortly after that came the first battle of Ypres.
The Aftermath

At some time following the battle for Gheluvelt my grandmother would have received a telegram informing her that Charles was missing. In April 1915 the following picture and a plea for news of him appeared in the Cheltenham and Gloucester Graphic.

The caption reads:

**Corporal C G Price**

1st Gloucester Regiment who has been reported as missing by the War Office. He was the son of Mrs WJ Gardner 22 Worrall Street, Kingsholm, Gloucester, who would be very grateful for any news of him.

Charles had obviously been promoted to Corporal in the field. This would not have been surprising considering his previous army experience and the fact that so many of his comrades had been killed.

At some time following the publication of this article my grandmother received a letter from one of Charles’s friends who had been fighting alongside him when he was killed.
The letter is written in pencil and very much reflects the courtesy and respect of the day.
Dear Madame,

Just a line to let you know that your son Charles was killed and died a hero’s death.

Well dear Madame I saw the back of the letter you sent so I thought that it was my duty to let you know all about it as long as you was worrying about your son.

He is buried quite respectable as I know Charlie and was sorry all of us to see the back of him.

Well dear Madame I can’t say any more only I should be very glad to hear that you received this letter quite safe.

I remain your ever sincere,

H Lane.

Below is a photograph of Harry Lane which appeared in the Cheltenham and Gloucester Graphic following his repatriation after having been wounded.
As there is no date on Harry Lane’s letter it is not known if it was in response to the Gloucester & Cheltenham Graphic article or as soon as Harry was repatriated.

The Aftermath.

My grandmother had lost her son and husband and although Aunt Millie and Aunt Clara were probable working times would have been quite hard.

I would imagine that as my grandmother was Charles’s next of kin she may have been able to claim some kind of pension or other financial support.
Aunts Clara and Millie. (Note the War Service badges each is wearing).

Persons working in any part of industry connected to the war effort were issued with a brass badge having a unique serial number. This showed that they were doing their “bit” for the country.

War Related Items

Princess Mary decided that she would provide all service personnel with a gift for Christmas 1914. Each person would be given an embossed brass tin of special design. Each tin would contain items suitable for recipients gender, age and ethnic group. The typical contents of a soldier’s tin was 1 ounce tobacco, 20 cigarettes, a bullet pencil and sometimes a pipe, a photo of Princess Mary and a Christmas card.

A boy soldier would have sweets instead of tobacco as would a nurse. Tins for Indian Troops would contain spices. Where a soldier was missing or killed in action the next of kin would receive the brass tin, a picture of Princess Mary and a Christmas card.
The next significant item was the bronze death plaque given to the next of kin of soldiers killed in action
I join with my grateful people in sending you this memorial of a brave life given for others in the Great War.

George R.I.
H

E whom this scroll commemorates
was numbered among those who,
at the call of King and Country, left all
that was dear to them, endured hardwess,
faced danger and finally passed out of
the sight of men by the path of duty
and self-sacrifice, giving up their own
lives that others might live in freedom.
Let those who come after see to it
that his name be not forgotten.

L.Cpl. Charles Price—
Gloucestershire Regt.
Charles Price’s Medals

Charles’s Cap Badge

1914 Star & Bar  War Medal  Victory Medal

The 1914 Star is often referred to as “The Mons Star” as most recipients fought in this battle. Later it was realised that some recipients of the Star may not have been actually fighting at this time so those who were under enemy fire during 1914 were awarded a “bar” to the medal.

Conclusion
At last I had good understanding of the life and death of Charles Price. There is obviously more to learn and given the opportunity I would like to find out more. I still find it strange that I had never heard of Charles or if I did why had it not formed a part of my memory when growing up. My other uncle, Charles Kingscott my mother’s brother also died as a result of WW1 and very little was said of him. Although obviously enough was said to lock his memory in my mind, Perhaps the war and it’s aftermath was so unpleasant that people preferred to forget.

Believing in Coincidence

It is said that lighting doesn’t strike the same place twice but to my mind it gets pretty near. Having exhausted the majority of accessible information in respect of Charles Price I returned to the basic task of pursuing the general history on both sides of the family.

With my wife’s side I had begun with two carrier bags of old photographs and a general idea of the shape of the family tree. At the beginning of my research both my wife’s mother and her father’s brother were alive and they helped a great deal with many of the photographs which in the main were un-named. However the first lesson that I learned was that even when you’re young you forget names and faces. Therefore, when you are in your middle to late eighties it’s obviously worse. Both my mother-in-law and her brother-in-law had forgotten many key people. They found it just as frustrating as I did. Subsequently there was a little conjecture and guesswork that crept in. Albeit most areas of doubt were eventually clarified one way or another as the project progressed.

The last six generations on my wife’s father’s side of the family came from the Forest of Dean. Their occupations ranged from coal miner, as you would expect, to woodsman, timber haulier, miller and tenant farmer. My wife’s great grandparents were the tenant farmers and their last farm was situated in Hope Mansell just inside the Herefordshire border.

Thomas Burdock and Abiha Jones just after their Wedding

Thomas was always known as Burdock in the family. The name Burdock came from his mother’s side of the family whose surname was Burdock.
I had a fair number of documents as well as heaps of photographs so it was not too difficult to put that part of the family tree together. Burdock and Abiha Jones had four daughters, Evelyn, Lydia, Kathleen, and Ethel-Mary. Ethel being the oldest and also my wife’s grandmother. There are numerous photos of the girls around the farm and my mother-in-law had very little difficulty in identifying them. In fact I had met at least one and knew the children of the others quite well.

One photo I particularly liked was of Abiah and two of her daughters. The girl on the right hand side I assumed was Kathleen and the one to the left was Evelyn. Some of the photos had written captions but most did not. However it was reasonably easy to identify and group them. My wife’s grandmother was also easy to recognise as were numerous other people who were still circulating within the family greater unit.
Like many girls of this period Ethel went into Service as a ladies maid and eventually married George Thomas who was a “Gentleman’s Gentleman”. This title was given to a man servant who chaperoned a member of the family who had a disability of some sort. In this case a learning disability. A gentleman’s gentleman lived as part of the family.
Unfortunately George died 1917 leaving the grandmother a widow with two small sons, my wife’s father and uncle in this case. Eventually she remarried and her new husband Hugh Hawkins was the paternal grandfather we all knew. Hugh was affectionately known as Nana to all of the children.

Hugh Hawkins (seated) and Friend

Hugh came from a well connected navy family. His father had been a captain in the Royal Navy as were his uncles. Hugh followed suit and served as an engineering officer. He had two brothers and two sisters. Hugh’s family had either died or lived in other parts of the world so by the time I came to know of them they were just photos and names.
Over a two year period I worked hard to split the photos into family groups. Some were easy as I either knew them and was able to look at the young person in the photograph and extrapolate to the person I knew. Others were named on the back of the photo or could be identified by who else was in the picture or maybe the place it was taken. Some were more tentative guesses such as age, dress or just appearance.

An example of this process was a photograph of a very smartly dressed young man pensively posed in a studio portrait. The photographer had a Bristol address and the young man appeared to be in his twenties. To me the clothing looked very much late Edwardian. I knew that some of Nana’s family had lived in the Bristol area and the smartness, age and style of dress would well place him as one of Nana’s brothers.
In the end I had collated some 150 photos into four main family groupings in five albums. I still have some 40 photos that I cannot identify the place or the subject although I have a pretty good idea which group they belong to. I know there must be some incorrect cataloguing but it is the best I can do at present.

Family reunion.
In May 2004 my wife’s cousin decided to have a family reunion. One reason which made this a good opportunity was that the one remaining family elder was coming to visit. Kitty was my wife’s father’s cousin. She was then in her early eighties. At this time of writing she is still with us but is no longer able to live independently.

One of the younger members of the other branch of the family had decided to start research into their side of the family so I took my family tree work along so that they could copy any root information I had. Obviously I took the photograph albums as not only were they relevant but I was quite proud of my work.

I sat with Kitty and we looked through the various albums. She was able to give me lots of background information as well as confirming who was who. It was very obvious that she had been around when many of the characters in the photos were alive and well.

When we got to the photograph of my wife’s great grandmother and her two daughters she pointed to the girl on the left and said “that’s not Evelyn, that’s Frances” So I asked who Frances was and she said “Frances was Alf’s wife”. Well the only Alfred I knew was my wife’s uncle and he was not even born at the time in question. So the next obvious question was to ask who was Alf? She then dropped
the “proverbial bombshell”. Alf was my wife’s grandmother’s brother and he had been killed in the First World War.

So Burdock and Abiah had four daughters and a son not just four daughters. No one had ever mentioned Alf or the First World War and I thought here we go again. Within a few further pages she pointed to the smart young man in the picture and said” that’s Alf, he worked as a railway clerk at Staplehill near Bristol.” Apparently as a small girl she had known Frances well and used to stay at her cottage near Bristol. Kitty also knew Mr and Mrs Whitmore, Frances’s parents, who also lived close-by.

Alf had joined the army and been sent to France where he was posted missing and presumed killed in action. For some years Francis had refused to believe he was dead and hoped he wold suddenly reappear. So I suddenly knew that the smart young man I assumed was Nana’s brother was in fact Alfred Jones my wife’s great uncle and another forgotten soldier.

Whilst I was digesting this new situation Kitty was looking at some odd unidentified photos and she suddenly said “there you are that’s me as a child standing in the garden of Frances’s cottage”.

I could not believe that here I was, once again in the same situation as I had been with the two letters from an unknown soldier. Kitty knew little more about Alfred other than he was her uncle and he had been killed in the First World War. She could also remember the fact that Mr Whitmore was a good gardener. A little later we found more photos of the Whitmore family accompanied by Kathleen, Kitty’s mother. Kathleen and Frances were obviously good friends. My next task was sift through all of the small photos, documents and artefacts to see if there was any items or documents relative to Alfred Jones.
Tucked away in a torn and battered envelop was the one and only key find that actually bore Alfred’s name. This was a Certificate of Registry of Birth showing that Alfred was born on the 21st August 1885 in the District of East Dean. It is the only reference to Alfred in any document, photograph or other medium kept by his family. It is as if Alfred’s death was so painful that he was erased from everyone’s memory.

**Alfred’s Birth Registration**

The certificate was found in a small brown envelop which appeared empty as the paper the certificate is printed on is no more than tissue.

**Alfred at Moat Farm**

There were also two small photos. This one shows Alfred trying out a plough. A piece of equipment no doubt he had used when growing up. The following photo shows Alfred with Frances.
Although Burdock was working as a haulier when Alfred was growing up he also farmed at a Smithway Farm and later at the Moat Farm before Alfred left home to become a Railway Clerk.

This photo shows Alfred and Francis at the front of Moat Farm no doubt taken at the same time as the photo with the plough.
The other item relative to Alfred was a pocket size railway rate book for 1893. This could have belonged to the farm and used for commercial purposes but its little used condition and the date suggests that it was one of Alfred’s that he had either left it at home or brought it home because it was out of date.

Railway Rate book for 1893

Fly leaf showing print date
The next step was to look Alfred up on the CWGC site. The conversation with Kitty had suggested that Alfred had been in the army. Sure enough he had been serving with the Machine Gun Corps and had died on March 21 1918. He also has no known grave so is remembered on panel 90 to 93 of the Pozieres Memorial. His details were given as:-

Private Alfred James Jones
No. 68016
24th. Machine Gun Corps

Certificate from War Graves Commission site.
1891 and 1901 census information

Checks with the 1891 and 1901 censuses provided further information.

1891 Census:-
Alfred born 1885 Westbury-on Severn
Living 36 East Dean Westbury-on Severn with
Thomas Burdock Jones 30yrs Timber Haulier
Abiah Jones Wife
Ethel Jones daughter - 8
Alfred Jones son-5
Eveline E Jones daughter-2
Lydia Jones daughter-6 months

1901 Census:-
121 Warmley, Syston, Gloucestershire,
Alfred J Jones - Railway Clerk – (born Lydbrook) – boarder.

Army Medal Roll
A check with the medal Roll for the army showed that Alfred was entitled to The British War medal and The Victory Medal. The fact that he was not entitled to the 14/15 War Star suggested that he did not enlist with the army until late 1915.

Army Pension Records
Frances would be entitled to a war widows pension and as such there should be pension documentation which would be in the unburnt records discussed earlier. After some confusion in respect of finding the right Jones I located the pension documents. The actual documents comprise principally of a duplicate of the soldiers service record added to which is any relevant information gathered from claimants etc.

The front sheet is a copy of the attestation of the particular soldier:-
Alfred James Jones
Holly House, Mangotsfield, Bristol.
30 years 3 Months of age.
The fact that he had been given a Notice (conscription papers) and understood it’s meaning.
Was willing to be vaccinated etc.
Had first joined the Gloucestershire Regiment (army No.30827)
On November 29th.1915
Enlistment notice served 25 August 1915.

Personal Details
Height 5ft. 5 ins.
Weight 138 lbs.
Chest measurement 35 ins. (4 inches of expansion)
Wife Frances Helen Jones, formerly Whitmore (spinster)
Married at Syston Parish Church 26 November 1915
Address Holly House, Mangotsfield, Bristol.
Details of Service

Attested 29.11.15
Mobilized 24.08.16
With 3rd. Reg. Glosters until 14.11.16
Transferred to Machine Gun Corps 14.11.16.
Folkstone to Boulogne 11.04.17 Joined base depot. 37 Coy
Various places – Field operations
  Hospital
  Frevents
  Rouen
  Camien
Various further locations in the field
UK on leave 21.02.18 to 08.03.18 to Field
Field – Missing KIA 21.03.18

In addition to the core information there are all sorts of communications and comments as well as medical details, promotions or demotions, disciplinary records etc.
The surviving service records are not always easy to read. The writing is often of poor quality with lots of overwriting. There are ink blots, creases and tears but none the less they are an invaluable source of information.

Having digested as much background information as possible the next aspect to examine was the circumstances surrounding Alfred’s death.

The Kaiser’s Battle.
Very little had been lost or gained by either side in March 1918. The allies were well dug in and the knowledge that the Americans were about to join in the battle against Germany was helping to improve moral. With the signing of surrender documents the Russian Front had collapsed thus releasing fifty German Divisions which could, in the main, be moved to the western front. Late in 1917 Ludendorf began to plan a Spring offensive which would break the British and lead to an early victory over the remaining French defenders. The Germans thought that British moral was at its lowest following the failure of the third battle of Ypres and the corresponding losses of personnel and equipment.

The plan was given the code name of “The Kaisers Battle” and comprised of two parts. Firstly the British line on the Somme area would be attacked and broken and then French Flanders would be attacked and defeated. The main tactics to be employed would consisted of a short but devastating bombardment of machine gun, artillery and communication positions followed by a “storm troop” advance in waves on the now more vulnerable infantry positions. In all 58 German divisions would be employed.

The 24th Batallion of the Machine Gun Corps were deployed around Le Verguier just north of the town of St Quentin. On one side they were supported by the 66th Division and on the other the 61st Division
The early morning of the 21st. March 1918 was shrouded in mist when the bombardment started. A fellow gunner with Alfred’s in the 24th. MGC was quoted as saying that the sheer intensity and effect of the shelling took most people by surprise. It was as if the bowels of the earth had opened up and hell had burst forth. It all seemed to happen simultaneously without any build up and the entire horizon blazed with red and gold muzzle flashes. There was little that Alfred and his companions could do apart from protect themselves and their gun from the rain of steel falling around them. All they could do was to take cover and wait for the shelling to die down then prepare themselves for the forthcoming attack by the German infantry.

The ground in front of the 24th. was somewhat undulating so that the first wave of German troops suddenly appeared as grey shapes methodically moving towards the waiting gunners. Second and third waves appeared marching with deliberation, moving almost as if they were on parade. As the first wave of the enemy were about to drop into a fold in the landscape, The British opened fire with every weapon they had, from Vickers and Lewis machine guns to rifles and revolvers.

As the Germans surged forward parts of the defensive lines were forced to give way resulting in the enemy taking over various facilities. This apparently caused some problems as the German troops discovered stores of equipment and food somewhat superior to their own. This then brought about mass looting and plundering delaying forward movement much to the anger of their officers.

Although many parts of the British defensive line were being forced into making tactical withdrawals the area around the village of Le Veguier held by the 24th. MGC and the rest of the 24th. Battalion held out for several hours of savage fighting. One witness said that the Germans had advanced through an area called Apple Tree Walk but were then held up by heavy trench mortar fire. After several repeat attacks and reorganisations the Germans had asked for the British to be heavily shelled which was done with deadly accuracy. Even so the German advance was limited to short gains of some 25 yards between each thrust forward. Gradually the enemies superior numbers and sheer fire power started to have effect and by 1800 hrs. British forces were withdrawn to a more defensible position. By the end of the day Alfred’s war was over and at that point in time even the approximate whereabouts of his remains were unknown. Needless to say that by the 5th. April the German advance was halted and the beginning of the end of the war was in sight.

As with any young wife Frances found it hard to accept the death of her husband. Alfred had died in what was now enemy territory, no one knew exactly what his fate was. It is most likely that none of his comrades survived to provide evidence of his death or otherwise. In the absence of the Germans announcing that he had been taken prisoner Alfred was most likely listed as missing believed killed in action. For some time Frances believed he would return, but she waited in vain.

The records show the process of Frances’s application for financial support and receipt of Alfred’s medals and other affects he left behind. In February of 1919 came the confirmation of Alfred’s fate in the form of a communication between the War Office and the German authorities.
Any further letter on this subject
Should be addressed to:

The Secretary, War Office
Finsbury Court
London E.C 2

And the number below.

February 1919


The officer in charge of the M.G.C. Record Office Westminster is informed that a report has been received on an official German List of Dead D26/85 No 68016 Pte. A. J. Jones MGC. 24. Bat. Fallen as reported 10 April 18 by an Infantry Regiment. Buried between CAULAINCOURT and PONTRU.

This report has been accepted as sufficient evidence of death for official purposes and the date of death has been assumed to be on or since 21st March 1918. The next of kin should therefore be notified accordingly and the usual non-off active document prepared. (The place of burial should be communicated to the next-of-kin, when the particulars are furnished.)

Signed for W.O.

Alfred’s body like many thousands of other soldiers still lies where it was interred on the battlefield the by the German burial party.
Sketch map showing location of the 24th Battalion Machine Gun Corps on 21st March 1918.

The line A B also shows that Alfred was fighting on the right flank on a line between Pontru and Caulaincourt.
Alfred is commemorated in the Pozieres Cemetery

Memorial Plaque commemorating Jones A J.
There is some evidence that Frances may have travelled to France to visit the cemetery and the site of the battle in which Alfred died.
Headstone for an unknown member of the Machine Gun Corps in the Pozieres Cemetery.

Over the years the many soldiers original resting places have been revealed by agricultural or civil engineering activities. Sometimes they can be identified as specific individuals by personal affects. At best most are identified as belonging to certain fighting groups by insignia alone. It would be nice if Alfred did find his way closer to the site where he is remembered personally.

Conclusion
I have tried to include as much relevant information as possible in this document. I am aware that there is a great deal of more accurate and detailed information that could be researched. This is especially true in respect of the general military information that provides the background to this story. However I am not a military researcher and my only interest was in telling a family story of two soldiers whose very existence might have been missing from the memory of our immediate families.

I am particularly pleased with the relationship established between these two lost soldiers who, although they may never have met, have some important aspects in common. Charlie died in one of the most influential battles at the beginning of the war whilst Alfred died in one of the most influential battles at the end. They were both sons of Gloucestershire. They both worked for the Midland Railway Company. Finally they were both brought together again through the marriage of my wife and my self.
Frontispeice from Midland Railway Memorial Book

Jones A.J. Private M.G.C.
Clerk Traffic –Coaching Section
Mangotsfield.

Price C.G. Corporal Gloucester’s
Labourer-Way & Works
Gloucester.