

# Reuben Charles Whitby

*9952, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers.*

*KIA 26 October 1914 aged 30.*

Reuben was born 8 June 1885 at Dunton Biggleswade. His parents were Charles Emanuel Whitby and Elizabeth Rachel (nee Pratt). He was one of 8 children and his younger brother **Harry** is also on the War Memorial.

He worked as a farm labourer for Mr. Fuller and in February 1903 he enlisted in the Hunts Volunteers joining the regular army on 6 February 1903 originally into the Kings Royal Rifle Corps. On the 16 October 1903 he joined The Northumberland Fusiliers.

He was then aged 17 years and 8 months, 5 foot 4 inches tall and weighed 109lbs. His maximum chest measurement was 34½ inches so not a large man. His complexion was fresh, his eyes blue and hair brown.

On 29 July 1907 he married Annie Hyde at Warboys Parish Church. By the 1911 census he was living with his in-laws in the High Street, Warboys and was the father of 5 children; 4 of whom had died in early infancy. His surviving child was Ruby and he was again working as a farm labourer. Three more children were born before war broke out.

Because of his previous military experience he was probably an army reservist as was **George Austin**, (also on the War Memorial) who has a consecutive service number to Reuben in the First Battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers. Both men were called up immediately and arrived at Le Havre, France on 14 August 1914.

Their Battalion became part of the Third Division which bore the brunt of the fighting in the Battle of Mons. This was the first confrontation of the British Army on European soil since the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. The battle did not go well and they were forced to retreat.

On 19<sup>th</sup> October the first battle of Ypres began. At 1.30am on 26<sup>th</sup> October the Fusiliers left their billets to relieve the 1st Lincolnshires in the front line. They occupied trenches in front of Neuve Chapelle. They were in position by 5.25am and apart from some sniping all was quiet until 3.00pm when heavy artillery gunfire began firing onto their trenches followed by an infantry attack at 3.30pm. Reinforcements were brought up and the line held although forced back around Neuve Chapelle. On the 11<sup>th</sup> November Reuben was reported as having been killed on 26<sup>th</sup> October at Neuve Chapelle. **George Austin**, who was probably also fighting there, died of a serious gunshot wound to the abdomen a few days later.

Reuben is remembered on Le Touret Memorial which commemorates over 13,400 British Soldiers killed in this sector of the Western Front from the beginning of October 1914 to the eve of the Battle of Loos late September 1915 and who have no known grave.

He was survived by his parents, wife and 4 children.

His brother Ernest joined The Hunts Cyclists Battalion and was later transferred into the Oxford and Bucks Regiment. He survived the war unlike the youngest brother **Harry** who died aged 16.