



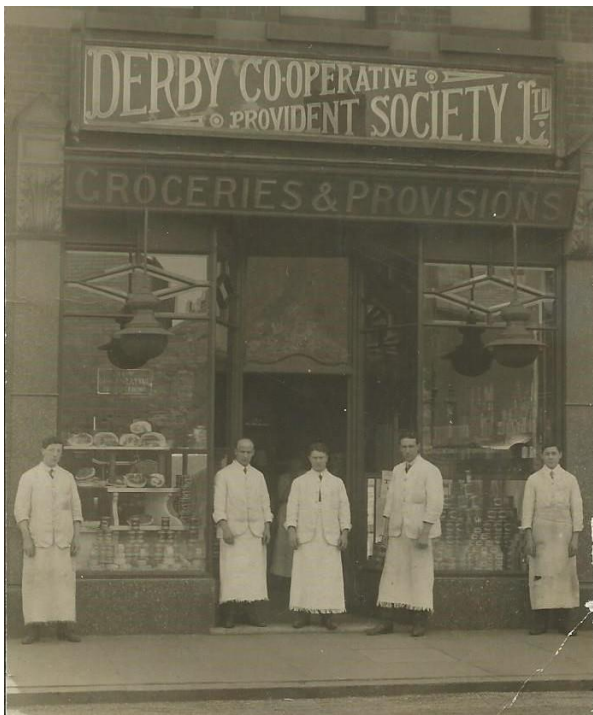
# Reginald James Oliver Severn

1896 - 1917

37 Statham Street



Reg was one of seven children born to James and Agnes Severn. The photograph below shows him (far right) outside the King Street Co-op, near where The New Flowerpot pub stands, where he worked as a Grocer's Assistant. His father also worked for the Co-operative Society.



In the 1911 census the family are listed as living at 37 Leyland Street. Apparently it was during his delivery rounds that he spotted the vacant house on Statham Street and persuaded the family to move.

When Reg volunteered in November 1915 he was just 19 years and 5 months old. He was assigned to Sherwood Foresters 2/5<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Notts and Derbyshire Regiment). He was not mobilised immediately and probably continued in his civilian job, wearing an armband to show that he had volunteered. His first active service was a

posting to Ireland following the Easter Rising in 1916, where he was involved with training and guard duty. In February 1917 he embarked for service on the Western Front.

On 26 September 1917 he was killed by a splinter from an exploding shell. This was during the attack on Otto Farm, part of the Battle of Polygon Wood, 26-27 September 1917. Allied troops were tasked with gaining ground in the area south and east of Ypres in Belgium to improve their strategic advantage. This battle was one of many during the Battle of Passchendaele (or the Third Battle of Ypres) fought between July and November 1917.

In a letter home to his parents his commanding officer wrote that Reg, aged 21, was one of the oldest men in his company and "he had always proved himself a good and cheerful soldier".



Photographs of Reg before he signed up and in the uniform of the Sherwood Foresters



# Reginald James Oliver Severn

## continued



Photograph of the Severn family probably taken in the summer of 1917, shortly before Reg was killed in action. Leslie, the baby of the family, seen sitting here on Agnes' knee was born in November 1916. In his absence his sisters, Winifred and Agnes, hold Reg's portrait. His oldest sister Elsie sits beside William – four years older than Reg. William suffered from Asthma so was unfit for military service. Their father James sits in the centre. Agnes and James had another child, Violet, who died in infancy.

All photographs are kindly provided by the Severn family – the information has come from his nephew who spoke at length with Winifred and Agnes when they were alive about Reg. He was fondly remembered by them as the joker of the family.

His personal effects did not reach his family until 22 February 1918, five months after his death, but then to the dismay of his family many of his belongings seem to have been missing. All they received home were a scarf, religious book and pair of nail scissors which they did not recognise as his – his letter, pocket book with photographs and watch were all missing.

His father wrote a number of letters pleading for the return of his belongings, but we don't know the outcome – it is likely that if he was hit by a shell the items were buried with him or in the chaos of war the items were lost or stolen – we can only imagine the family's heartbreak. It was reported at the time that he was not buried by his own regiment.

His family received a letter from his commanding officer stating "Your son, I am

told was killed outright by the splinter from a shell and consequently I am glad to tell you he can have suffered no agony". This may have been a phrase that was routinely written to the relatives of those killed in battle. Sometime after his death the family received a visit at 37 Statham Street from a fellow soldier, Stephen, who was with Reg during the attack on Otto Farm when he was fatally wounded. Stephen was ordered to leave him where he lay and take his rifle. Agnes's words to the soldier were: "You left my boy on the battlefield without a gun?"

After the war his parents went in search of Reg's grave, but his body was never found. His name is listed on Tyne Cot Memorial, in Belgium - one of nearly 35,000 men whose graves are not known. He is remembered on the war memorial for Co-op employees now located at the Co-op Funeral Services in Normanton, Derby.