

## Private Leslie Charles Edward Townsend, Durham Light Infantry of Church Stretton

died between 28 June and 5 July 1942, North Africa, aged 24

Leslie Charles Edward Townsend was born in July 1918 in Church Stretton. Leslie was the youngest child and only son of four children of John Edward Townsend, a painter and house decorator and his wife Fanny nee Gwilliam who were married in 1904.

John Townsend was born in Trentham, Staffordshire. His father Charles was a coachman who worked on a number of estates in Staffordshire and Shropshire. In 1901 the family were based near Peplow Hall in Hodnet. Fanny's father was a bricklayer from Bishop's Castle where she lived until her marriage.

The family's three daughters were born in 1904, 1906 and 1909, with the first two described as being born in Church Stretton and the later one born in Little Stretton. However, in the 1911 census the Townsend family of parents and three daughters are living in Acton Scott. By the time of the 1921 census the family, with the addition of Leslie, had moved into Church Stretton and are settled at 56 High Street. This building had an interesting history having formerly been the Britannia Inn. John described himself as an employer and was advertising himself as a decorator and house painter in the local Commercial Directories.



56 High Street, Church Stretton

However, John died prematurely at the age of 44 in February 1925. His effects amounted to £1,060 19s 2d and his executor was his brother Frederick. His widow Fanny continued to run the business until her death in October 1927 by which time her assets were only £297 14s 7d. Both John and Fanny are buried in the Cunnery Road Cemetery. We don't know what effect these early deaths had on Leslie.

The next mention we can find of Leslie is in April 1939 when a newspaper account describes him giving away his youngest sister Gwendoline Mary at her wedding to Harold

Hall at Eaton under Heywood church. Her address is given as still being 56 High Street. Leslie also performed the same service in December 1939 when his sister Edith married Walter Edwards at Church Stretton parish church. At this time her address was given as Albion House, 40 Watling Street South, though we don't know if Leslie was living with her then. Leslie's other sister Ethel Marjorie also married in 1939, but we don't have an account of her marriage to John Golden Jeggo.

We know little of Leslie's career before the war, or indeed of his war service. He seems to have joined the Kings Shropshire Light Infantry regiment initially, but at the time of his death in 1942 he was part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry.

Leslie was killed during heavy fighting after the fall of Tobruk on 21 June 1942. The severity and confusion of the fighting meant it was not possible to identify exactly when he died – sometime between 28 June and 5 July. The Durham Light Infantry battalions as a whole, suffered many casualties during this period.

Leslie is buried in the Tobruk War Cemetery in Libya, along with over 2,000 casualties from the Second World War. He is also commemorated on the Church Stretton War Memorial.

Leslie's sisters remained in Shropshire until the end of their lives.



Tobruk War Cemetery