Private Richard Arthur WILSON, G/4292
8th Battalion, Queens Own Royal West Kent Regiment
Reported as ‘Missing 25/27 September 1915’ in Casualty List C790 and later presumed killed in action on 25 September during the Battle of Loos [25 September to 8 October 1915]

Early Days

Richard Arthur Wilson was born in Kingsdown on 25 September 1895. The 1901 census records that his parents were Henry Wilson aged 34 born in Islington, London and Georgiana Wilson nee Price aged 32 born at Milton, Gravesend, Kent. At this time family were living at 1 Westfield Cottages, Kingsdown together with Georgiana’s 84 year old father, John Price a retired shepherd from Lenham. They had six children: Georgiana [aged 12]; Henry John [11]; Edward George [9]; Elizabeth R [7]; Richard Arthur [5] and Lucy May [3]. At the time of the 1911 census daughters Georgiana & Elizabeth were not at home, Sydney Victor [2] had joined the family and John Price had died. Richard was then working as Houseboy.

8th Battalion, Queens Own Royal West Kent Regiment [RWK] [72 Brigade, 24 Division]

Richard volunteered for military service and enlisted on 7 November 1914 at Bromley. The various papers from his service records that survived the WW2 fire damage reveal that he was then aged 19 years and 4 months, height 5ft 6 inches, & weight 123lbs. He was then employed as a farm labourer. Copies of these records may be obtained from the author.

Richard joined the newly formed 8th Battalion of the Queen’s Own Royal West Kent Regiment at Maidstone on 10 November 1914 and began his training. His records show that on 9 May 1915, Shoreham in Sussex, he overstayed his pass from 12.00 midnight until 4.30pm 10 May. For this he was admonished and forfeited two day’s pay.

The picture below is probably of his platoon which would be under the command of a 2nd Lieutenant [centre of middle row]. The soldier thought to be Richard is circled in white. The picture was probably taken whilst they were in training in southern England. The huts are typical WW1 construction.

The Battalion arrived at Boulogne, France on 30 August 1915 under the command of Colonel Vansittart. They were soon moved by train to MONTREUIL and then marched a short distance to billets in HUCQELIERS. They were in training here from the 4 to 20 September. They then marched at night with the three units from 72 Brigade [8 Queen’s, 8 Buffs & 9 East Surreys] arriving at a disused tobacco factory in BETHUNE [45 miles] on the morning of 25 September. The leading unit being some 3 miles ahead of them at BEUVRY.

Image 1 - Pte Richard Wilson pictured with his Platoon.
The 8th Battalion history records that: *The four nights’ marching had been rather exhausting, not so much on account of their length as on account of the congestion of traffic on the roads, which, combined with the darkness, made progress very slow.*

**The Battle of Loos**

The French and British commanders had agreed to attack on a front from the Bethune-La Bassee canal in the north through Lens and the Vimy Ridge to Arras with a further French attack in Champagne. The British army put twelve divisions into their sector from the canal to Lens. The attack commenced on the morning of the 25 September with the 21st and 24th divisions being in the reserve under the control of the overall British commander field marshal Sir John French. Regrettably these two divisions were not as near the front as they should have been and there was some delay in transferring command from Sir John French to British 1st Army Commander general Sir Douglas Haig. The inevitable consequence of this was that the reserves had to be rushed to the front.

The 8 Bn Royal West Kents and the other troops had little rest before they marched to VERMELLES and then into the front line. They also had no experience whatsoever of actual battle field conditions.

As they approached the town it was evident that a battle was in full swing with prisoners and wounded coming down from the line and the thud of gunfire could be heard in the distance. From the eastern edge VERMELLES they marched to LE RUTOIRE FARM and then by compass bearing to the LONE TREE [the battered remains of a flowering cherry tree now replaced] across the entrenched and cratered ground with occasional artillery rounds dropping near them.

They then formed up with the Brigade ready and advanced some 500 yards to the old German front line which lay along the line of the Loos - Le Bassee road [now a farm track] on a slight ridge.

The history states: *It is interesting to note that although this part of the line was supposed to be occupied, no troops were passed on the way up, and there were none in the trenches to be relieved. Although the shelling had been fairly heavy, the casualties were not very serious, but included Lieut. P. T. Smith, slightly wounded in the foot. He refused, however, to be sent down to hospital. Col. Vansittart was also slightly wounded in the hand during the night.*

Our instructions were that we should attack at dawn, [of 26 September] the objective for the Brigade being the main German position some 2,000 yards away, which stretched from Hulluch village on the left to the Bois Hugo and on to Hill 70 on the right, our frontage being from Hulluch to the Bois Hugo.

Considerable sniping and random shell-fire was kept up by the enemy during the night, but did very little damage. The Battalion scouts, under 2nd Lieut. Harris, were sent forward during the night, 25/26th, and came back with the report that Hulluch was in the hands of the enemy and strongly organised, and that they were also holding the line of the Lens—La Bassee road.
No orders for the attack at dawn [26 September] came to us, and we had to wait. As the light grew stronger, the enemy's artillery fire increased and casualties became more numerous, while our guns did heavy counter-battery work. At about 10.20 a.m. Col. Vansittart was sent for by the Brigadier and got orders to attack at 11 a.m.; he reached the Battalion again at 10.53, and only had time to give orders for the whole Battalion to move up into the fire trench... We were told that there were plenty more fellows in reserve to go through us, and that the troops on either flank would attack simultaneously with ourselves. We were to leave Hulluch village on our left...

Punctually at 11 o'clock the first wave, with B and D Companies in the front line, left our trenches, followed at short intervals by the subsequent waves. The 9th East Surreys were on our right, and the 8th Buffs (right) and the 8th Queen's (left) were in support. Instead of a whole division attacking on our left, a handful of some fifty to seventy-five men, belonging to a Welsh regiment, alone left our trenches, the orders apparently having arrived too late, while the right flank of the East Surreys also appears to have been in the air.

The ground to be covered sloped gradually down to the Lens—La Bassee road, and from there rose to the main German positions, about 1,100 yards beyond, near the crest of the ridge running north from Hill 70. The attack was carried out at a marching pace in order to save the men's breath for the final charge and bayonet work, and the advance was so steady and the formations so regular that it looked more like a field day at Aldershot than part of a great battle. The enemy brought a very heavy rifle, machine-gun, and artillery fire to bear on the attacking lines, and shortened his range to keep pace with the advance with wonderful precision; but the casualties up to this point, though severe, were not inordinately heavy.

When the first wave was still some hundred yards short of the main road, the enemy withdrew, some retiring in very open order up the hill, and many of these were shot down by our men, while stronger parties made off to either flank, those on our left gaining the village of Hulluch, and those on the right reaching a sunken road on the near side of the Bois Hugo. A very severe machine-gun fire from either flank swept the road, and very heavy casualties were sustained in crossing it. About 400 yards east of the road the Battalion passed a forward German trench full of enemy dead.

As the advance swept up the long slope towards the main German trenches the machine-gun fire increased in intensity, being very severe from both flanks. Shelling directed from behind Hill 70 [south of Bois Hugo] and from the south-eastern part of Hulluch was also very heavy, and two field guns were brought up to a position from which they took the attack first from the flank and later from the left rear, firing practically over open sights.
In spite of the very heavy casualties which were being sustained, the Battalion continued its advance up the slope with the utmost gallantry, but it was found on reaching the enemy’s main position that the barbed wire protecting it was absolutely intact. What more hopeless situation could possibly have arisen? When the orders for the attack were issued, it had been assumed that all the enemy’s wire had been cut by our bombardment, but here, after a most gallant advance of about 2,100 yards in face of a murderous fire, not only from the front, but also from both flanks, the Battalion, and in fact the whole Brigade were faced with a thick belt of uncut wire, swept by artillery, rifle, and machine-gun fire from three different directions. With assistance on our flanks to keep the enemy occupied and to draw a due proportion of his fire, it would perhaps still have been possible to force a way through the wire and capture the trench. We wish to make it quite clear that we are not blaming our comrades on either flank for their failure to help us. The facts appear to be that at the time fixed for our attack the enemy himself launched a counter-attack against the troops on our right, who were consequently pinned to their ground, while the orders did not reach those on our left in time, with the consequence that the 72nd Brigade had both its flanks exposed, and the enemy was able to concentrate on the one brigade the fire of the artillery and small arms which would normally have been used on the front of three divisions.

Many men made gallant attempts to get through the wire, 2nd Lieut. Don being killed when half-way through. The remainder dropped to the ground where they were and returned the heavy fire from the enemy's trench. The situation, however, was hopeless. In front was an impenetrable belt of wire, and the line, such as was left of it, raked with rifle and machine-gun fire from the front and both flanks, and enfiladed by an equally deadly artillery fire. What were the men to do? Turn to their officers for orders? Out of the twenty-five officers who had left our trench little more than an hour before, only one was now unhurt. To stay where they were, outflanked on both sides, was impossible, and the poor remnant of that gallant Battalion was forced to make its way back to the line of German trenches from which it had started. There they remained for the rest of the day, subjected to heavy shell-fire. Lieut. W. K. Tillie, the Battalion Machine Gun Officer, the only officer who was not a casualty, brought the Battalion out of the line the same night, when it was relieved and moved back to bivouac in a field near Noeux-les-Mines.

At some point in the initial advance on the 25th Richard and a few others were killed and his body was never recovered. Many more were to die on the following day. Richard is commemorated on the Loos Memorial at Dud Corner Cemetery with 198 other members of the Battalion killed on 25/26 September 1915 [Panels 95 to 97].

The War Diary entry for the 26th has a single line entry reading:
Attack HULLUCH, lose ¾ of Battalion.

A full strength Battalion has a strength of just over 1,000 of whom 30 were officers! The Battalion suffered 750 casualties in in all leaving only Lt. Tillie and 250 men effective. Their commander Colonel Vansittart was amongst the many wounded on the battlefield. He was taken by the Germans and remained a prisoner for the rest of the war. Three commanders of other Battalion were killed and two wounded.

Some readers may also be surprised to learn that five officers of General rank were killed that day too. The bodies of two of them were never recovered along with the bodies of two full Colonels. The total number who have no known grave commemorated on the Loos Memorial is in excess of 10,800 [24 to 30 September 1915].

The survivors received warm praise from the Brigadier who commented that the 8th Battalion had “added glory” to the regiment and been “an example of steadiness and determination… not only to the New Armies but to seasoned troops”. The Corps Commander adding that even though the attack had failed to take its objectives it had forced the enemy to divert reserves from their battle against the French. The remnants of the battalion were withdrawn to recuperate and receive much needed drafts from the depot. October saw them go back into the line south east of Ypres where both sides found that the mud and water in the trenches were as much an adversary as the enemy. The end of November saw them go out of the line to rest and re-equip near St. Omer.

The fighting at Loos continued into October particularly around the Hohenzollern Redoubt, the
Quarries, Hulluch and Hill 70 and elsewhere with little further progress being made. Total British casualties [dead, wounded and captured] were 50,000 with the French and German casualties being both about 200,000. This was the first battle in which the British used gas. Its initial release caused 2,632 British casualties with seven deaths as the wind reversed direction. Gas remained a poor offensive weapon until the development of gas shells enabled the artillery to fire them directly onto enemy positions. Whilst this front remained quiet into 1916 another soldier from the village was to lose his life in this area before the year end.

The aftermath

Richard’s name is not shown on the village War Memorial at his mothers insistence. His name can, however, be found inside St Edmund’s Church on the WW1 memorial there (pictured to the right). In addition there is a brass Bible stand usually found on the altar. It is inscribed as follows: To the Glory of God and in loving memory of Richard Arthur Wilson, aged 20. Killed in France September 25, 1915. In Jesus keeping. It was presented by his family. The Kent Messenger of 21 October 1916 published this report:

Pte R A Wilson (Kingsdown)
8th Royal West Kents.
Missing Twelve Months – now Reported Killed.
Mr & Mrs Wilson of Kingsdown, near Sevenoaks, have received news after twelve months’ anxiety, that their son, Pte Richard Wilson, was killed at the age of 20. He joined in November, 1914, went to France the end of August 1915 and took part in the battle of Loos September 25th, 1915. He was a most loving son and brother, writes a correspondent, but “greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

His Medal Index Card (pictured to the right) shows that he was awarded three medals: the 1915 Star, the Victory Medal and the War Medal. There is a note on the fly leaf of a copy of Holy Communion, Preparation and Companion in the possession of a family member (image 9).

The text reads:

Richard Wilson 1909.
The Lord took him
September 25th 1915 and
Lucy September 7th 1936.

Richard was single and
Lucy was his youngest
sister who married Basil
Lawrence in 1922.

It’s possible, given that
Richard was 14 years old
in 1909 that he could have
been confirmed that year
and that this book was
given to him then.

Richard’s brother Edward
also served in the army and
there are some notes about
him overleaf.
Edward George Wilson.
Richard’s older brother enlisted into the Royal Garrison Artillery on 6 November 1916. Employed as an engineers labourer he was then 24 years old. His military medical examination showed that he had flat feet so could not march any distance. As a consequence he was not fit for infantry duties, thus arose his assignment to 35 Heavy Battery with the Gunners. Edward married Amy Grace Stevens on 23 August 1916 just prior to going to France. Amy gave birth to a son, Edward on 3 April 1917. On 26 August 1916 Edward was charged with overstaying his leave (by 1 day, 2 hours & 25 minutes) when he returned to his unit. He was awarded 7 days Field Punishment No 2 (to be kept in fetters and/or handcuffs for 2 hours in 24 but not fixed to an object). In February 1918 he was hospitalised and returned to the UK suffering from Trench Fever and flat feet. He returned to the BEF in May 1918 and came back to the UK and was discharged on 7 May 1919.

Notes
Helmets - October 1915 saw the issue of steel helmets, prior to that caps as seen in Image 1 were worn at the front. Wellington boots came into service at the same date as helmets.

Credits.
Images 1, 5 & 9 by the Author from documents held by Martin Draper whose help is appreciated.
Images 7 & 10 from Ancestry.co.uk. Other images from this source are available from the Author.
Other images by the Author or as credited. Map below is from Google earth.

Martin W Stoneham MInstRE, Military Historian. West Kingsdown. September 2015. martin@stoneham.org http://www.stoneham.org

Visiting. [A 4 wheel drive vehicle is recommended to ensure ground clearance on the farm tracks.] The whole battlefield area outside the towns and villages remains in agricultural use so is little changed and it is easy to see the life of the land. The first suggested stopping point is Viewing Point 1 [50.4835 2.7537] on a minor road on the outskirts of Vermelles. Looking ahead you can see Le Rutoire Farm [50.4826 2.7659]. Move on past the farm and take the track to the Lone Tree [50.4779 2.78202]. Return to the road from the farm and go to St Mary’s ADS Cemetery. Just past here you can turn right onto the old Loos - Le Bassee road to Viewing point 2 [50.4773 2.7915], when at the point look across to your left to see the view in Image 3. If you are very careful you can continue to Loos otherwise turn and go back to the main road and onto Hulluch. Turn right and take the D947 towards Loos & Lens which takes you across the centre of the battlefield, then go onto Dud Corner.
### Image 10 - Attestation Form

**SHORT SERVICE.**
(Three years with the Colours.)

**ATTESTATION OF**

**No.** 4293
**Name** Richard Wilson
**Corps** Royal West Kent Regt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions to be put to the Recruit before enlistment</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is your name?</td>
<td>1. Richard Arthur Wilson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In or near what Parish or Town were you born?</td>
<td>2. In the Parish of... St. Margarets in or near the Town of... Sewan in the County of... Kent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Are you a British Subject?</td>
<td>3. Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What is your Age?</td>
<td>4. 19 Years 6 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What is your Trade or Calling?</td>
<td>5. Farm Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Have you resided out of your Father's house for three years continuously in the same place or occupied a house or land of the yearly value of... for one year, and paid rates for the same, and, in either case, if so, state where?</td>
<td>6. Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You are hereby warned that if after enlistment it is found that you have given a wilfully false answer to any of the following seven questions, you will be liable to a punishment of two years imprisonment with hard labour.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Are you, or have you been, an Apprentice? if so, where? to whom? for what period? and, when did, or will, the period of your Apprenticeship expire?</td>
<td>7. No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Are you Married?</td>
<td>8. No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Have you ever been sentenced to imprisonment by the Civil Power?</td>
<td>9. No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Do you now belong to the Naval Navy, the Army, the Royal Marines, the Military Police, the Army Reserve, the Territorial Reserve, or any Naval Reserve Force? if so to what unit?</td>
<td>10. No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Have you ever served in the Naval Navy, the Army, the Royal Marines, the Military Police, the Territorial Reserve, the Territorial Reserve Force, the Imperial Yeomanry, the Volunteers, or any Naval Reserve Force? if so, state which unit, and cause of discharge</td>
<td>11. No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Have you truly stated the whole, if any, of your previous Service?</td>
<td>12. No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Have you ever been rejected as unfit for the Military or Naval Forces of the Crown? if so on what grounds?</td>
<td>13. No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Are you willing to be vaccinated or re-vaccinated?</td>
<td>14. Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Are you willing to be enlisted for General Service?</td>
<td>15. Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Did you receive a Notice, and do you understand its meaning, and who gave it to you?</td>
<td>16. Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Are you willing to serve upon the following conditions provided His Majesty should so long require your services?</td>
<td>17. Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For a term of three years, unless War lasts longer than three years, in which case you will be retained until the War is over. If employed with Hospitals, depots of Mounted Units, and as Clerks, your money shall be retained after the termination of hostilities until your services can be spared, but such retention shall in no case exceed six months. If, however, the War is over in less than 3 years, you will be discharged with all convenient speed.

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I, Richard Arthur Wilson, do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and that I am willing to fulfill the engagements made.

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**OATH TO BE TAKEN BY RECRUIT ON ATTESTATION.**

I, Richard Arthur Wilson, do solemnly swear by Almighty God, that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs and Successors, and that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs, and Successors, in Person, Crown, and dignity against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs, and Successors, and of the Generals and Officers set over me. So help me God.

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**CERTIFICATE OF MAGISTRATE OR ATTESTING OFFICER.**

The Recruit above named was cautioned by me that if he made any false answer to any of the above questions he would be liable to be punished as provided in the Army Act.

The above questions were then read to the recruit in my presence.

I have taken care that he understands each question, and that his answer to each question has been duly entered as replied to, and the said recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the oath before me at...

Signature of the Justice

If any alteration is required on this page of the Attestation, a Justice of the Peace should be requested to make the alteration under Section 8 (9), Army Act.

The Recruit should, if he require it, receive a copy of the Declaration on Army Form 7085a.

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Image 10 - Attestation Form
The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment

The regiment can trace its roots back to 1756 when it was found as the 50th Foot. It spent most of the Seven Years’ War in England and then fought in Germany in 1760. In 1778 they saw action with the Royal Navy as marines. Retitled the 50th or West Kent Regiment of Foot in 1782 they went on to see service in Egypt, Denmark and the Peninsular War (1808-1814) where they were nicknamed the Dirty Half-Hundred. The dye from their uniform cuffs black facing stained their faces as they wiped sweat away. In 1827 they were retitled 50th (Duke of Clarence’s) Regiment of Foot, in honour of the future William IV of the United Kingdom, and then as the 50th (Queen's Own) Regiment of Foot in 1831 in honour of William's wife, Queen Adelaide.

The Cardwell reforms of 1881 Army gave Kent two county regiments, one of which was the Queen's Own (Royal West Kent Regiment). It was formed by merging the 50th (The Queen's Own) Regiment of Foot and the 97th (The Earl of Ulster’s) Regiment of Foot, which became the new unit’s 1st and 2nd regular battalions.

A year after the merger, 1st Battalion left Britain for Egypt. 1st Battalion fought in the Sudan in 1884, then spent most of the following 30 years in India, Malta and Britain. 2nd Battalion spent most of the period between 1882 and 1898 in Ireland, at the end of which it moved to Egypt and then, in 1900, to South Africa following the outbreak of the Boer War (1899-1902). It then transferred to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1902 and spent the rest of the pre-1914 period in Hong Kong, Singapore and India.

1st Battalion moved to Ireland in 1911 and from there it deployed to France at the outbreak of the First World War (1914-18) in August 1914. They served in Italy between November 1917 and April 1918, before returning to the Western Front for the remainder of the conflict. In February 1915 2nd Battalion landed in Mesopotamia where it remained until the war’s end, although two of its companies were captured by the Turks at Kut al Amara in April 1916. The regiment also raised 14 Territorial and New Army battalions between 1914 and 1918.

1st Battalion deployed straight to France at the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-45) in September 1939 and was evacuated from Dunkirk in June 1940. Meanwhile, 2nd Battalion had moved to Malta in 1939 and garrisoned the island throughout its siege. In June 1943 it left Malta to serve in North Africa, where 1st Battalion had landed three months earlier.

In September 1943 2nd Battalion joined the unsuccessful Dodecanese Campaign. It was captured on the island of Leros. In May 1944 the regiment formed a new 2nd Battalion by renaming its 7th Battalion, though this remained in Britain until the end of the war. 1st Battalion spent 1944 fighting its way up through Italy, until being transferred to Greece in December of that year. 4th Battalion served in Burma where it played a leading role in the epic Battle of Kohima (1944).

In 1945 2nd Battalion joined the occupying forces in West Germany, returning to Britain in 1947 and merged with 1st Battalion the following year. The regiment served in Malaya during the Emergency (1948-60) from 1951 to 1954, the Suez Crisis of 1956 and against EOKA (National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters) guerrillas on Cyprus from 1957 to 1958. It returned to Britain in 1959 and two years later amalgamated with The Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment) to form The Queen's Own Buffs, Royal Kent Regiment. They joined the newly formed Queens Regiment in 1966. The Queen’s Regiment joined with the Royal Hampshire Regiment in 1992 to form the Princess of Wales’s Royal Regiment.

**Motto of Queen's Own (Royal West Kent Regiment)**

'Invicta' (meaning 'Undefeated' - the county motto of Kent, inherited from the 50th Foot)  
'Quo Fas et Gloria Ducunt' (meaning 'Where Right and Glory Lead' - inherited from the 97th Foot)

Left: Cap badge as worn in 1914.  
Right: Present day PWRR cap badge.