



A Rededication Service for

**Private John Walton**

8<sup>th</sup> Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment

**10.30 hours Wednesday 21 May 2025**  
**CWGC Perth Cemetery (China Wall), Belgium**

**Service conducted by Reverend Gary Birch CF**  
**Senior Chaplain Headquarters South West**

## **Private John Walton**

27 October 1895 – 15 February 1916

John Walton was born in Birmingham in 1895, the fourth of 9 children born to John Walton, a confectioner, and his wife Elizabeth.

John arrived in France with the 8<sup>th</sup> Bn South Staffordshire Regiment, landing in Boulogne on 14 July 1915. Within days they were in Belgium, and by 27 July they were in trenches at Reninghelst – a few miles south-west of Ypres. The battalion stayed in the Ypres area until the following January when they finally earned a few weeks away from the front, re-organising and recuperating near St Omer. During this time they also undertook training in bombing, signalling, machine gunning etc.

On 6 February the battalion made for the Ypres area again, and that same evening they took over trenches at Verbrandenmolen to the south-east of Ypres. The battalion War Diary records daily bombardments and shelling, as well as news of gas being used in the line to the north of their position, but generally low casualty numbers until the 13 February when the bombardment intensified and the enemy attack began. The next few days involved repeated attacks and counterattacks, with brief lulls whilst the respective sides each tried to consolidate their gains, until the battalion was relieved on the morning of 17 February. John was one of 38 men of the 8<sup>th</sup> Bn to die during the 10 days between entering the line and being relieved, during which time there was a direct shell hit on a British dressing station, as well as a failed attack on the enemy lines. Following the war, more than half of the men killed in this period had no known grave, and most were added to the Menin Gate Memorial to the missing in Ypres, when it opened in 1927.

John Walton's name was not added to the Menin Gate – and in fact he was not commemorated as a casualty of the war at all until 2010 when a case of non-commemoration was submitted to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission for consideration. Upon consideration of the evidence they found that John was eligible for commemoration and his name was added to the Menin Gate later that year.

In August 1919 the body of a British soldier was recovered in close proximity to some buildings near Verbrandenmolen. No cross or marker was found to indicate that the casualty had been formally buried, but the remains were positively identified as belong to Pte J Walton 13923 of the 8<sup>th</sup> Bn South Staffordshire Regiment thanks to an identity disc found with them.

These remains were re-buried at Perth (China Wall) Cemetery and the early records show that the grave was initially considered to be that of Pte Walton. Subsequently however this information was struck through, and the grave was re-described as that of an unknown British soldier.

Although the exact details are uncertain, it is likely that when the effects branch of the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquires came to trace the details from the ID disc to match them to a Battalion Ledger a problem was uncovered – the details associated with the grave – Pte J Walton, no. 13923, 8<sup>th</sup> Bn South Staffordshire Regiment – did not match a known fatality of the war. Unfortunately John's service number had been mis-recorded in the Battalion Ledger as 14923.

Instead, the mis-recorded information was matched to Pte I Walton, no. 14923, 8<sup>th</sup> Bn East Lancashire Regiment – who survived the war. His surname and number were a match for the disc, and the letters used to denote his first initial, and that of his Regiment, could easily be mis-read. Since the casualty could not possibly be Pte I. Walton, he was buried as an unknown soldier. John meanwhile dropped out of the Commission records, and went entirely uncommemorated.

Thanks to the work of the original researcher who suggested that John should be commemorated back in 2010, and the work of another researcher who submitted evidence about the identity of the unknown Staffordshire soldier buried at Perth (China Wall) Cemetery, today for the first time in nearly 110 years, we are able to commemorate John properly, at his final resting place, reuniting his physical remains with his name, and rededicating his grave accordingly.

## **Welcome**

Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, will live even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

John 11.25.26

We are gathered here today in this place of remembrance to honour a fallen soldier who is now reunited with his name.

Today we remember with thanksgiving Private John Walton who, alongside so many others, answered the call of their country, served with honour and gave their lives in the service of their nation.

As we rededicate this grave, let us also commit ourselves anew to remember each one here. For by so doing we honour them all and we reflect upon their sacrifice.

Let us offer ourselves in God's service that His will may be done on earth as it is in heaven and that His kingdom of justice and peace be established everywhere.

## **Opening Prayer**

Let us recall the presence of God, the Father of all mankind, maker and sustainer of all that is, whose purposes are good, whose love is never withheld and whose mercy never passes away. We call to mind His faithfulness in times of darkness and despair and we remember before Him Private Walton, and all who have served in the Armed Forces of our nations; who counted service to others greater than service of self, and who gave their lives in battle.

Merciful Father, hear our prayers and comfort us; renew our trust in your Son whom you raised from the dead; strengthen our faith that all who have died in the love of Christ will share in His resurrection; who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

**Amen**

**Reading: If I should fall** by John Ebenezer Stewart

*Read by a representative of the British Embassy*

If I should fall upon the field  
And lie among the slain,  
Then mine will be the victory  
And yours the pain;

For this in prospect comforts me  
Against all saddening fears  
That, dying so, I make myself  
Worthy of your tears.

*John Ebenezer Stewart was born in Scotland and originally joined the Scottish regiments during the war. He was killed in action in April 1918 whilst commanding the 4th Bn South Staffordshire Regiment at Ypres.*

**Scripture Reading:** Luke Ch. 12 v. 6-7

*Read by Sergeant Dominic Masters, 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, The Mercian Regiment*

Jesus told them, 'Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.'

**Address**

*The Reverend Gary Birch*

## **The Act of Dedication**

We rededicate this grave to Private John Walton  
in the name of Christ who died and rose again;  
as a symbol of our remembering, as a sign of our thanksgiving,  
a token of recognition and expression of our love.  
We look forward with confidence to our reunion with him  
and all those whose dwelling is forever with Christ in the everlasting  
kingdom of the Father.

## **The Exhortation**

*Read by Sergeant Dominic Masters, 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, The Mercian Regiment*

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old.  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them.  
**We will remember them.**

## **The Last Post**

*Cpl Jason Pickin, The Band of the Mercian Regiment*

## **Silence**

## **Reveille**

### **Kohima Epitaph**

*Read by Sergeant Dominic Masters, 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, The Mercian Regiment*

When you go home tell them of us and say:  
"For your tomorrow, we gave our today".

## **Laying of Wreaths**

### **The Collect of the South Staffordshire Regiment**

*Read by Peter Gresty, The Mercian Regiment Association*

Almighty God, who by thy son Jesus Christ has delivered us from the bonds of our sins, vouchsafe, we pray thee, so to bind us thy servants of the South Staffordshire Regiment in charity with one another, that in all dangers and adversities we may ever keep the unity of the spirit, being knit together in the body of the same thy son Christ our Lord.

### **The Lord's Prayer (all)**

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
**Amen.**

### **The Blessing**

God grant to the living, grace; to the departed, rest; to the Church, The King, the Commonwealth, and all mankind, peace and concord; and to us and all his servants, life everlasting; and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, come down upon you and remain with you always.  
**Amen.**





The Ministry of Defence, through the Joint Casualty & Compassionate Centre, is responsible for the research, identification and burial of all British casualties worldwide.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission cares for the graves, memorials, records and memory of the 1.7 million Commonwealth servicemen and women who died during the two world wars.

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