



Ted Ambrose

By Dan Hill



Ernest Edward 'Ted' Ambrose was born in the village of Cottered near Buntingford on 3rd March 1898 to Samuel and Harriet Ambrose. Ted was the first of five children to the couple, having two younger brothers and two sisters. Ted's father Samuel was in 1911, a horse keeper on a farm and, during his childhood years, Ted was introduced to the traditional agricultural lifestyle in which his family had been employed for generations.

Around 1913 the family left Cottered and moved to Wallington Lodge near Baldock where Samuel had been offered employment in the responsible role of Farm Bailiff. Here in Wallington, Ted enjoyed helping his father and attending church on Sundays with the rest of his family, for whom religion played a very big part. By the summer of 1914 Ted had met local girl, Gladys, and they soon became sweethearts, corresponding regularly and meeting at the weekends. At this time, Ted also took up employment on the staff of the Duke of Bedford's estate, a role that he held for just a few short months when war was declared and he decided to enlist.

When war was declared in August 1914, seventeen-year-old Ted Ambrose, like so many other young men at the time, was caught up in the wave of Patriotism that had swept across the nation. Within weeks of the declaration of war, Ted had enlisted with the 6th Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment, a unit of 'Kitchener's Army' men, raised specifically for the duration of the war.

Over the next year, and still underage, Ted was engaged in training with his Battalion on his old employer's estate at Ampthill Park in Bedfordshire. Whilst learning the art of soldiery, he kept up a regular correspondence with both his parents and his girlfriend Gladys, with whom he had grown very close. During his training, Ted's caring parents regularly sent him gifts and useful items such as a French phrase book and a map of Paris.

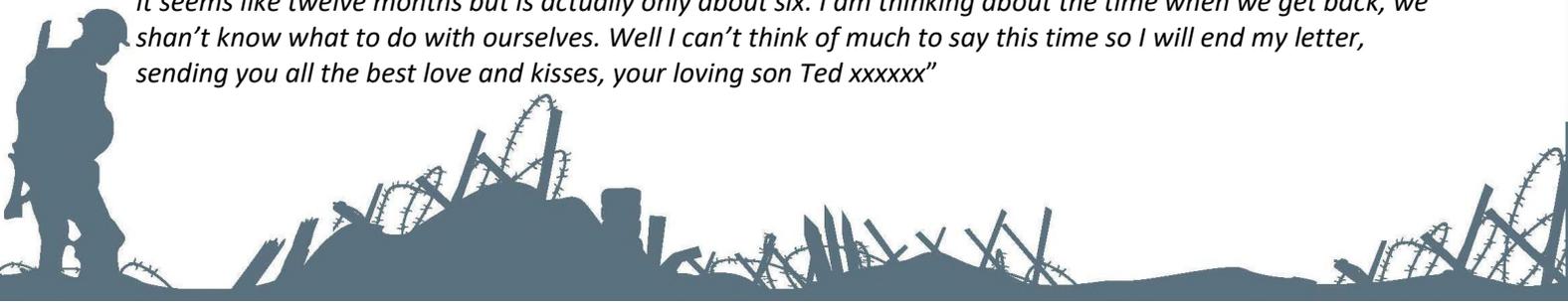
In February 1916, aged eighteen, and still underage for overseas service, Ted left Britain and set sail for France. Ted's father wrote a moving letter to him on the eve of his leaving for war.

Ted arrived on the Western Front in February 1916 and his early experiences of war were fraught with back luck and misfortune. On his very first 'turn' in the trenches, Ted was dazed by a nearby shell explosion and perforated both eardrums, requiring a period in hospital to recover.

Returning to the front at the end of February, Ted's next correspondence to his parents was on 3rd March where once again he was writing from a hospital bed. *"Dearest Mother and Father, I am sorry to tell you that I am in the hospital and what should you think, with German measles!". Despite his misfortune, Ted kept up a regular correspondence with home, even sharing humour with his girlfriend Gladys who chastised Ted, as she said to contract his illness he 'must have been cuddling German girls'.*

Before long, Ted was once again back in trenches, this time on the Somme. When the Great offensive of July 1916 began, Ted and his comrades were in reserve, but by 12th July 1916 found themselves holding frontline trenches near La Boiselle.

On the 6th July 1916 Ted wrote home to his mother, telling her that he was now at the front once again. He enquired of family friends at home and finished his letter *"well it seems a very long time since I came out here, it seems like twelve months but is actually only about six. I am thinking about the time when we get back, we shan't know what to do with ourselves. Well I can't think of much to say this time so I will end my letter, sending you all the best love and kisses, your loving son Ted xxxxxx"*



Two days later, Ted and his Comrades in the 6th Beds were subjected to a very heavy artillery bombardment whilst in trenches near La Boisselle on the Somme. Within three days MR & Mrs Ambrose were informed that their son was amongst the casualties, badly wounded by shrapnel.

Mrs Ambrose immediately wrote to the military authorities, requesting permission to visit her son who at that time had been moved to a British base hospital at Etaples in France. One day later she received the following telegram "Regret to inform you Private E E Ambrose, 6th Beds, Dangerously ill G.S.W (Gunshot wound) left leg and head at British Military Hospital, Etaples. Regret permission to visit cannot be granted."

The reason for denying the visit request soon became clear. Ted's mother received the telegram in the morning of 14th July 1916, by the time she had read it, her son Ted had died of his wounds.

Heartbroken at the loss of her first child, when Ted's possessions were returned to her some weeks later, she put them into a suitcase, unable to look at them. From the 1920's onwards, the suitcase remained forgotten until it was rediscovered in 2014. The suitcase, and Ted's possessions are here on display at the Herts at War exhibition today.

