

**Pte. Sidney Cleaver**  
1<sup>st</sup> Gloucestershire Regiment

## Pte. Sidney Cleaver 1<sup>st</sup> Gloucestershire Regiment

*Commemorated on Newbridge War Memorial as S. Cleaver*

*Commemorated on Gloucester War Memorial*

*Commemorated on Celynen Collieries Roll of Honour*

### Family

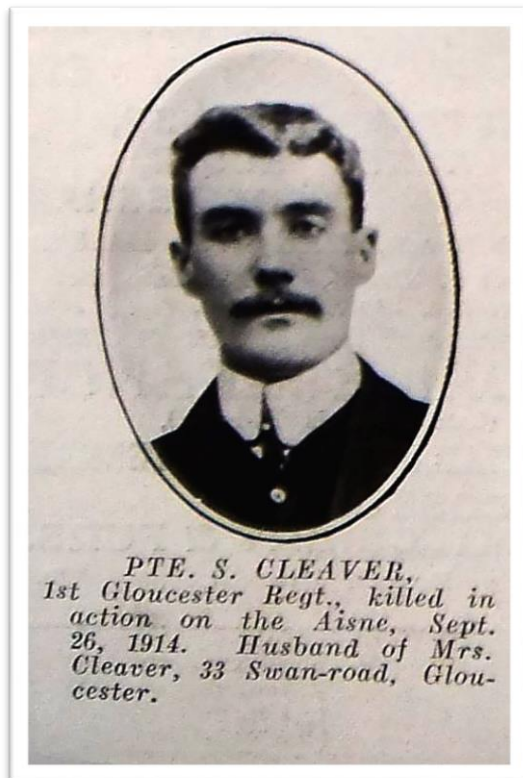
Sidney Cleaver was born around 1888 in Bristol, the son of Samuel and Mary Cleaver. He was educated at the Northgate Wesleyan school in Gloucester.

Mary Cleaver became widowed in 1891 when Samuel died at just 35 years of age, she remarried in 1897 to James Henry Beazer who was nearly twenty years her senior. In the 1901 Census Sidney is living with them at 1 Barbican Gardens, Gloucester and was listed as the stepson of James Beazer.

On 23rd August 1904 Sidney enlisted into the Army and joined the Gloucestershire Regiment with the regimental number 7722. He served for three year with the Colours and then passed into the reserves. Sidney Cleaver married Frances Mary Ann Symonds on 30th November 1909 and went on to have three daughters; Gwendoline Frances b 28th Dec. 1909, Mary Elizabeth b 13th Sept. 1911 and Iris May b 14th April 1914.

After the birth of their first daughter, Gwendoline, the family moved to Newbridge where they were boarders at 3 Greenfield. They lived with Frank White and his family along with a further three boarders. Sidney was employed as a Coal Hower at the Celynen colliery.

### Military



After the declaration of war on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914 the British army needed to mobilise as quickly as possible in an attempt to get to France in time to stop the German advance. Sidney Cleaver had been a regular soldier and was still a reservist so he was one of the very first men to be recalled into the army.

On 5th August 1914 public notices in the press, Post Offices, Police stations etc. would have instructed him to report to his regimental depot. Upon showing his Army identity paper he would have been given five Shillings subsistence money at the local Post Office and the ticket office at his local railway station would have provided him with a ticket to Bristol, where the Gloucester Regiment depot was located.

With other 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion reservists he would then have proceeded to Borden (near Aldershot) by train followed by a couple of days marching to break in new boots and some rifle practice.

## Newbridge War Memorial

In the early hours of the morning on 12<sup>th</sup> August the battalion boarded two trains at Bordon station headed for Southampton docks. The first train, carrying A & B Companies, arrived at 5 a.m. and the second, carrying C & D Companies and the Machine Gun Section came in 90 minutes later.

The battalion then proceeded to board the 'Gloucester Castle' for the journey to Le Havre. The first casualty of the campaign was recorded when one of the draft horses sustained a head wound during embarkation.

The battalion was soon in action in a number of the iconic battles of 1914. On 23-24<sup>th</sup> August they fought at the battle of Mons and on 27<sup>th</sup> August they were involved in the Readguard action at Etreux.

From 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> September 1914 they were at the Battle of the Marne and between 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> September they fought in the Battle of the Aisne including the capture of the Aisne Heights. They saw action again on 20<sup>th</sup> September in the actions of the Aisne Heights.

Sidney Cleaver was killed in the action of Chivy on 26<sup>th</sup> September. As can be seen from the following extract from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion War Diary his unit was not involved in any great attack or defence on the day although other units around them were. Rather he became one of the many casualties of the war who were killed in their trenches whilst being shelled by enemy artillery

### *Extract from the War Diary 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Gloucester Regiment*

26 <sup>th</sup> Sept 1914	In the same position. The 2nd Inf Bde. relieved the 18th Inf Bde during the night. The shelling during the early morning was heavier than usual & at 4 am. there was a good deal of rifle fire on the part of the 2nd Inf Bde on our right.
4.15 am.	Queens opened fire on a few Germans in their front.
4.30 am.	B Coy reported about 40 Germans moving W along their front.
5.00 am.	C Coy reported some 200 Germans massing in front of Queens trenches also that Germans were entrenching in front of the left of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Inf Bde. & the M.G. Section opened on them. The Artillery also was directed against them.
5.45 am.	The Brigade informed us that the attack seemed to be developing against the left of the S.W.Bs.
7.00 am.	A. Coy reports a hostile extended line along the front of the Bn.
7.40 am.	A. Coy reports 2 hostile M Gs on his left front, they dropped some bullets behind our trenches but did not fire after 8 pm.
9.20 am.	S.W.Bs report that an attack is being delivered on their front. 2 Platoons of D Coy have been sent in support & 2 Coys E Yorks have been sent for the same purpose.

## Newbridge War Memorial

9.25 am. Queens report Germans had dug a trench in front of their left from which the 2nd Bde trenches could be taken in reverse, the Battalion has been asked to enfilade it, but it is not visible from our trenches. A section R.E. has been sent for to advise & possibly sap up to crest from where the trench may possibly be enfiladed.

9.30 am. D.Coy reports over 200 Germans collecting at the head of the CHIVY valley.

11.00 am. A.Coy reports 150 Germans in extended lines advancing towards Queens on our right.

The Germans began shelling our trenches and went on up to 4 pm. causing some casualties. The first shell burst just in front of the trenches where a group of officers was standing and killed Lt. Morley R.E. who had come up to arrange about obstacles in front of our trenches and wounded 2nd Lt. Watkins in the shoulder but not severely.

No actual attack was delivered against our trenches. The two main attacks each of about 1 Bn were against the Queens trenches in the early morning and on the S.W.Bs trenches later, they were both repulsed with heavy losses, the Artillery of the 2nd Division shelling both columns. The S.W.Bs lost heavily from the attack.

Our total casualties during the day were:- 1 Officer wounded, 4 men killed, 23 men wounded.

The four Gloucester Regiment men killed on that day were: Pte. Sidney Cleaver 7722, Pte. William Capener 8216, Pte. Francis M Baker 9453 and Pte. A E Hemming 7143.



Pte. Sidney Cleaver is commemorated on the La Ferté-sous-Jouarre Memorial.

He is commemorated on the memorial as he has no known grave, either because his body was not recovered or his grave's location was lost as the area was fought over again in the campaign of 1918.

Sidney Cleaver's widow received a letter from his Captain who wrote...

*"He was a plucky young soldier, always ready for anything – a man I could thoroughly trust. Only ten minutes before his death he had volunteered to go out with his platoon commander to reconnoitre some of the enemy trenches, a task requiring pluck, which was carried out quite satisfactorily."*

### Sources

CWGC.org, *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919*  
British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920  
De Ruigny's Roll of Honour 1914-1924, 1st Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment War Diary  
1901, 1911 Census, Cheltenham Chronicle & Gloucestershire Graphic