

Sapper Stanley Alfred Albert Roff

(22nd January 1920 - 22nd June 1941)

This is the inscription on a Commonwealth War Grave in St Matthew's Churchyard, Lightcliffe plot J30. Sapper S.A.A.Roff was the only WW2 soldier buried or even commemorated in the churchyard. But why was Stanley Alfred Albert Roff of the Royal Engineers buried there?



His parents were Stanley (Charles) Thomas Roff and Bertha Elizabeth Roff nee Watts from Burbage, Wiltshire. A Wiltshire memorial to Sapper Roff is noted by the Wiltshire Family History Society (ref 103243).

Father Stanley was christened Stanley Charles Thomas Roff(e) on 18th June 1886 in Great Bedwin, Wilthshire the son of Thomas Vincent Roffe and his wife Mary Ann. Mother Bertha Elizabeth Watts was born in 1883 the daughter of Joseph Watts and Tryphena Watts nee Collier. Stanley and Bertha married in the Marlborough district of Wiltshire in 1910 and then appeared together on the 1911 census. The two 27-year-olds were living at 1 Bell Court, Barn(?) Street, Marlborough with Bertha's younger brother 14-year-old Albert Edward Watts. Stanley was a "Stoker in Gas Works".

The Great War would dominate the next decade which may explain why their sons Stanley Alfred Albert Roff and Percy Frederick Roff were not born until 22nd January 1920 and 5th January 1922 respectively in the Pewsey district of Wiltshire. Fifty-two-year-old Bertha Roff's died on 12th February 1937 in the Devizes district. The *North Wilts Herald* from Friday 19th February 1937 reported the :-

DEATH OF MRS ROFF

Mrs Bertha Roff, wife of Mr Stanley Roff, of Ram Alley, died in the early hours of Friday at the age of 52 years. She leaves two sons. The funeral service took place on Monday at the Parish Church and was conducted by the Vicar (the Rev. A.G. Baker). The principal mourners were: Mr S.Roff (widower), Stanley Roff (son), Master Percy Roff (son), Mrs Cox, Swindon (sister) Mrs Dunsdord, Swindon (sister), Mrs White, Salisbury (sister), Mrs Hobbs, Bournemouth (sister), Mrs Roff , Bedwyn (sister in law), Mr and Mrs Watts, London (brother and sister in law) and Mrs Neale Bedwyn.

This left father and son Stanley Roffs at home when the 1939 register was taken.

1939 register

| | | | | | | | |
|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------------------|---------|----|---|
| Stanley T | Roff | 04 Apr 1886 | Male | County Council Labourer | Widowed | 87 | 1 |
| Stanley A A | Roff | 22 Jan 1920 | Male | General Farm Labourer | Single | 87 | 2 |

Address 168a Ram Alley, Pewsey, Pewsey R.D., Wiltshire, England

At some point after this Stanley Roff junior joined the Royal Engineers.

Younger brother, Percy Roff, has not been found on the 1939 register. He may well have been at sea. There are a number of records listing him on ships – *British Power*, *Houston City*, *Southern Princess*, *Suderoy* - travelling between Glasgow or Swansea and New York in 1942 and 1943 where he is variously described as a 'gunner' or a 'deckhand'. It would appear that Percy Roff served in the Merchant Navy on board ships escorting the convoys across the Atlantic. One of the ships he had sailed on was *Southern Princess* (pictured below) which was sunk by a U-boat on 17th March 1943. Fortunately, Percy F. Roff was not on board at the time. Having married in 1941, he and his wife brought up a family in Wiltshire where he passed away in May 1996.



Meanwhile his older brother Sapper Stanley A. A. Roff must have been posted to somewhere near Halifax which was how he came to be walking down Wakefield Road, Lightcliffe on the night of Sunday 22nd June 1941. The following newspaper reports tell you what happened.

24th June 1941

Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer

Soldiers Struck by Van

Sapper Stanley Alfred Albert Roff (21) whose home is at Marlborough was killed, and his companion, Sapper Patrick Stanton, Long Street, Hainslop, Buck., was seriously injured about the head, late last night, when, as they were walking along Wakefield Road, Lightcliffe, they were knocked down by a motor van travelling in the same direction.

24th June 1941

Bradford Observer

Night Road Death

One man was killed and another admitted to the Royal Halifax Infirmary with serious injuries as result of an accident in Wakefield Road, Lightcliffe, just before midnight on Sunday. The dead man is Stanley Alfred Albert Roff aged 21, whose address is at Marlborough, and the injured man Patrick Stanton, of Hainslop, Bucks, who is suffering from severe head injury. The two men were walking close to the footpath near to Lightcliffe Church when a motor-van travelling in the same direction collided with them.

25th June 1941

Halifax Evening Courier

ROAD VICTIM CONDITION

The condition of Sapper Stanton (28), who was admitted to Halifax Infirmary on Sunday, after a road accident near Lightcliffe Church, was today also reported to be "very ill". Stanton was walking with Sapper S.A.A.Roff in Wakefield-road when they came in contact with a motor-van travelling in the same direction and being driven by Herbert Watson of Cleckheaton. Roff was killed.

No death record has been found for Sapper Patrick Stanton, so he appears to have survived his injuries. But there is obviously one for Sapper Stanley Alfred Albert Roff, a copy of which is below along with his Lightcliffe burial record.

| DEATHS in the Sub-District of BRIGHOUSE in the County of YORK (W.R.) | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|------|------|--|--|--|------------------------|-------------------------|------|-----------|
| 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. | 9. | 10. | 11. |
| Column 1 2a. When and Where Died. | Name and Surname. | Sex. | Age. | Rank or Profession. | Cause of Death. | Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant. | When Registered. | Signature of Registrar. | | |
| Twenty-first June 1941 Wakefield Road Marlborough Bridgeman 40 | Stanley Alfred Albert Roff | M | 21 | Sapper in the Royal Engineers of Han Alley Marlborough | Accidentally knocked down and killed by a motor van | Corporal received from S. Morris Corporal for 2nd Riding of York Infantry Head 24 July 1941 | Twenty July 1941 | T. H. Hayes Stamford | 1941 | Registrar |

| Lightcliffe, St Matthew > 1941 | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------|--|--|--|--|--|
| 3315 | T 42 | June 12 th | June 16 th | Eugene Stella Barnet | 2 years | | | | | |
| 3316 | 4 30 | June 23 rd | June 27 th | Stanley Alfred Albert Roff | 21 years | | | | | |

Wakefield Road, Lightcliffe was where Stanley Roff was knocked down. If he had a military funeral, it would seem appropriate that it was held in the church close to the spot where he was killed. Did his father and brother travel up from Wiltshire for it? We will never know. But we do know that Sapper Stanley Alfred Albert Roff was buried in St. Matthew's churchyard on 27th June 1941 and the plot, J30, was given a CWGC headstone. It is one of four CWGC headstones in the churchyard that the CWGC look after, cleaning them every few years. They also check on a few other family graves where WW1 soldiers were buried.

Before volunteers cleared the churchyard of its overgrown vegetation a few years ago the cleaning must have been a difficult task for the CWGC. But now they comment on the much easier access. Below are before and after cleaning images of Sapper S.A.A. Roff's headstone. At the time of writing the headstone has just been cleaned again.



Not being a local lad Sapper S.A.A. Roff is not listed on any Roll of Honour in the area but as you can see little crosses are placed by his headstone in November around the time of Remembrance Sunday. His name is obviously on the Army's Roll of Honour and on a Wiltshire Memorial Inscription Index which also states that he is commemorated at Burbage, Wiltshire. It looks as if brother Percy and his wife Elsie nee Lay(e) registered a son Stanley A A Roff in the Marlborough district during Q2 1949 only for the baby boy to pass away during the same quarter.



22nd June 2021 will be the 80th anniversary of Stanley Alfred Albert Roff's death.

D.M.Barker
June 2021