

Sergeant George John FOWLER

Service number 5669328
Somerset Light Infantry
Died on 1 August 1941, aged 29

Born in Wells, George was a professional soldier who had served in India before the war. In 1940, he returned to the UK from Gibraltar, and became an instructor at the Infantry Training Centre in Taunton. On 1 August 1941, he died when a mortar bomb fuse accidentally exploded. George was married and had a son. The War Memorial calls him 'J. G. Fowler' but on his gravestone in Wells Cemetery he is called George John.



Lance Corporal Fowler in about 1937
The stripes at the bottom of his sleeve indicate 6 years' service
Photograph courtesy of Mr John Fowler, George's son

George was born in Wells on 7 September 1911, to John George Fowler and Frances Elizabeth née Norton. His father was a grocer's carter and the family lived at 2, Charles Place, Southover. George was baptised at St Cuthbert's Church on 8 October.

He had three sisters and three brothers. Before joining the army, he worked for Wookey Hole Paper Mill. His wife was Joan Margaret née Chandler from Bristol, and their son was John.

There is some confusion over George's name. The War Memorial and the local rolls of honour call him 'J. G. Fowler' and the newspaper reports call him 'John George', but his family called him 'George John' and so that is what is used here.

The story of his life and death were told in the *Wells Journal* of 8 August 1941:

Full military honours were accorded to Sergt. John George Fowler, of the Somerset L.I. at the funeral at Wells Cemetery on Wednesday afternoon.

Sergt. Fowler was accidentally killed in the course of his duty at Taunton on Friday last. He was the youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. John George Fowler, of 5, Green's Place, Southover, and was married about three years ago, his wife residing at 1, Bell Close [off South Street]. There is a young child aged two ...

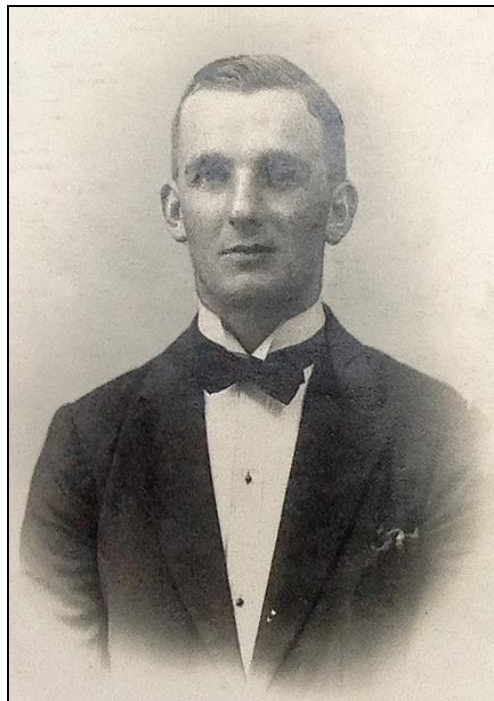
Sergt. Fowler, who was acting as Sergt. Instructor, joined the Army about 11 years ago and had served for seven years in India and had spent a year at Gibraltar. He returned to England about nine months ago and was home on leave a few weeks before his death. The body was brought to Wells and rested in St. Cuthbert's Church, where the first part of the service was held ...

The body was conveyed to the Cemetery on an army vehicle, the bearers being fellow Sergeants of his company. His C.O. also attended. The company also provided a firing party and bugler.

The following week (15 August 1941), the *Wells Journal* reported on the inquest into his death:

A verdict of "Death by Misadventure" was returned. Sergeant Fowler was attached to an infantry training centre and he was killed when a [mortar] bomb fuse exploded in the armoury at the training centre. The medical evidence showed that death was due to shock and hemorrhage from two punctured wounds in the chest.

George is buried in Wells Cemetery in Section H. Row L. Grave 3. He is also remembered on the rolls of honour at Wells Town Hall and Wells Cemetery.



George Fowler

Photograph courtesy of Mr John Fowler, George's son

Based on the details given in the *Wells Journal*, it seems that George enlisted in about 1930, and then served in India with the 1st Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry. The battalion was then stationed in Wellington in southern India. In 1934, it moved to Poona (now Pune) in the east, where it remained

until 1939. Communal rioting was then rife and on several occasions the battalion was called upon to “show the flag” in Poona, and Sholapur. Having served his seven years in India, it seems likely that George returned to Wells and was put on the reserve. Then when the war came he was recalled to the regiment and went to Gibraltar to join the 2nd Battalion, which had been there since January 1939 (and would remain there until it went to Italy in 1944). George came back to England in about November 1940 and joined the Infantry Training Centre in Taunton.

Outside of his army career, George was a sportsman. He was a life-guard at the swimming pools in Wells and Wookey Hole. He and Frank Pople, who also died in the war, were great friends and took part in bicycle races at Wells Athletic Ground, using bicycles with bamboo spokes.

George’s widow, Joan, remarried on 14 April 1943 and became Mrs Hawker.

We would like to thank Mr John Fowler, George’s son, for his help in writing this article. We would also like to thank Mrs Jan Stubbins for putting us in touch.