

TOM VIDLER



Tom Vidler was one of those minor heroes of the First World War whose exploits are barely remembered. He came from an ordinary background – he followed his father into becoming a house painter. His father died in 1904 and he lived at 4 High Street with his mother Harriett (Foster).

Vidler was born at Battle in the middle of 1885, so was 29 when the war started. He joined the Royal Engineers as a Sapper under Major Cecil Ticehurst, from one of the best-known families of Battle, moving up to Lance Corporal in 1917. While no-one can ever have been comfortable on the Western Front, at least he survived uninjured; but only through luck. At some later point, he wrote in a note that his life had been saved by the New Testament that he carried – the shell fragment had hit the book and had not reached his body. The testament and his war medals are among the material preserved at the Battle Museum.

He owed his distinction to an act away from the front line. On 28 August 1918 he and his men were in a bathing parade in the Aisne Canal (a bathing parade was an organised event designed to get men to wash and simultaneously to have a little bit of fun away from the actual fighting.) when

a Sapper Coleman sank and became stuck in the mud. Discovering this, Lance-Corporal Vidler dived and searched for him, and after great difficulty succeeded in rescuing him. Artificial respiration proved successful, and it was the gallant action of Lance-Corporal Vidler, that undoubtedly saved his life.

Tom's younger brother Major (the name, not the rank) also served, in the Royal Garrison Artillery. He had married before the war and had two children. He was wounded in the chest late in 1917 and sent home. He later became secretary of the Battle British Legion and died in 1971. There appear to be no descendants.

At the end of the war Tom resumed his old work. He married Florence Foord at St Peter's, Bohemia, in 1923 but he died of influenza and pneumonia in 1927. His occupation was then given as a house painter and sign writer. He and his wife had no children. Florence lived to June 1978.

Sources

Military and other records from www.ancestry.co.uk
Battle Museum of Local History
Hastings and St Leonards Observer