



Sapper Bertram Dawe (also found as *Daw*), (Number 757514), of the Canadian Engineers, Canadian Expeditionary Force, is buried in Hamilton Cemetery: Grave reference, Grave 32, Section S, Lot 116.

(continued)

His occupation prior to military service recorded as that of *sub-station operator*, Bertram Dawe has left little history behind him of his early days spent in the area of Burnt Head, District of Port de Grave, Newfoundland, where he grew up, He may well, however, have been the young man, the *B. Dawe*, whose name appears on a passenger list of the SS *Ivermore*, a ship which at the time plied the Cabot Strait between Port aux Basques, Dominion of Newfoundland, and the port and mining town of North Sydney in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia.

The crossing was that of May 9, 1913, and the young man was on his way to Hamilton, Ontario, where – if he were indeed the Bertram Dawe, the subject of this short biography - his mother's sister, Julia Ann*, was living with her husband by that time - to seek employment as a labourer. The 1911 Census does not record him living with his aunt's family in the home at 493, King Street, West Hamilton; all that can be said with any certainty is that he was still resident in Hamilton in 1916 – at 68, Crooks Street – for that was where and when Bertram Dawe was to enlist.

**On several of Sapper Dawe's papers she is recorded as having been his sister: she was in fact his aunt. Younger than Bertram Dawe's mother, her sister, by seven years, Julia Ann married William Daw of Cupids on December 21, 1896, the couple then to parent two children, Stanley-William, the elder, and Frances (Fanny). William Daw was then killed in an accidental explosion at sea on May 21, 1903, on board the SS Coban en route from St. John's to Montreal. His widow, Julia Ann, emigrated to Hamilton in the year 1904, subsequently to meet Louis James Ellis from England and the couple married on November 20, 1907. A son, Charles, was born in or about 1908.*

His first pay records show that it was on January 8 of 1916 that the 91st Regiment of Canadian Highlanders of the Canadian Militia began to remunerate Private Dawe for his services. Four days prior to that he had presented himself for medical examination, a procedure which had pronounced him as...*fit for the Canadian Over-Seas Expeditionary Force* and thus he was to enlist at the Hamilton Recruiting Depot on that January 8 and also to attest, his oath witnessed by a local Justice of the Peace*.

**At this time there was a number of complaints in the city about the pressure being exerted on the population by the recruiting sergeants in a bid to find some five thousand 'volunteers'. The authorities were obliged to reel them in a bit.*

His service to the 91st Regiment was to last but a week. The Canadian Militia had been established for the defence of the country and thus by law was prohibited from operating outside the borders of the country. However this did not preclude either its personnel volunteering for the Overseas Battalions, newly-forming since the Declaration of War in August of 1914, or from recruiting on behalf of these new units. Thus on January 15-16, Private Dawe was transferred to the 120th Battalion (*City of Hamilton*).

The formalities of his enlistment were soon to be brought to a conclusion when, only days later again, on January 20, Major Samuel John Huggins*, on behalf of the Commanding Officer of the 120th Battalion, declared – on paper – that...*Bertram Dawe...having been finally approved and inspected by me this day...I certify that I am satisfied with the correctness of this Attestation.*

**Already returned from Ypres where he had been wounded, he was over fifty years of age.*

There was now to be a period of training to be undertaken – indoors since it was in the depths of winter at this time. The venue was likely to have been the James Street Armouries* with which the 91st Regiment was already associated. Then when the weather later allowed, Private Dawe's Battalion was to move into tents for further training at Niagara-on-the-Lake.

**Later to become known as the John W. Foote VC Armouries. Honorary Lieutenant Colonel John Weir Foote was the only Canadian military chaplain to be thus decorated, having won the award during the raid on Dieppe in August of 1942.*

At the end of the first week of August, 1916, the 120th Battalion was on its way eastward to the east-coast port of Halifax, there to embark onto His Majesty's Transport *Empress of Britain*. It was one of four such Canadian Infantry units to do so: also taking passage to the United Kingdom on board the ship were the 117th, the 121st and the 126th Battalions.



(Right above: The requisitioned Canadian Pacific vessel Empress of Britain had been used as an Armed Merchant Cruiser during the early days of the War until 1915 when, from then until the end of the conflict, her task had been changed to that of a troop-transport. - The image is from the Wikipedia web-site.)

The *Empress* was to dock in the English west-coast port-city of Liverpool on August 24 and Private Dawe's Battalion was thereupon transported by train southwards to the Canadian military complex by this time established in the county of Hampshire. It had been built in the vicinity of the villages of Liphook and Bramshott, the second of which was to lend its name to...*Camp Bramshott*.



(Right above: Royal Canadian Legion flags amongst others adorn the interior of St. Mary's Church in the English village of Bramshott. – photograph from 2016)

Private Dawe and his comrades-in-arms were now to once more commence training and to await the call to *active service* on the Continent. While many of the personnel were eventually to find their way to the *Western Front*, for the 120th Battalion as a whole it was a call that was never to come*.

**Before the end of the Great War, Canada was to have despatched overseas just over two-hundred fifty battalions – although it is true that a number of these units, particularly as the conflict progressed, were below full strength. At the outset, these Overseas Battalions all had aspirations of seeing active service in a theatre of war.*

However, as it transpired, only some fifty of these formations were ever to be sent across the English Channel to the Western Front.

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By far the majority of the Overseas Battalions remained in the United Kingdom to be used as re-enforcement pools and these were gradually absorbed, particularly after January of 1917, by new units that had by then been designated as Canadian Reserve Battalions.

In the case of the 120th Battalion, the majority of the personnel still serving in the unit on January 20, 1917, was to be absorbed into the newly-formed 2nd (Canadian) Reserve Battalion, also stationed at Bramshott.

Apparently Private Dawe was one of the exceptions to the above generality and on January 25 was *taken on strength* by the 134th Battalion, itself to remain as a component of the Canadian 5th Division in the United Kingdom until in turn to be absorbed by another reserve battalion in March of 1918.

The 134th Battalion (*48th Highlanders*) having arrived in England just prior to Private Dawe, had originally been stationed at *Camp Bramshott*; but in November of 1916 it had then been transferred to the not-far-distant Canadian *Witley Camp*, in the southern extremes of the adjacent county of Surrey. It was here that he, Private Dawe, was now to spend a further four months, until May 23 of 1917.

On that last date he was *struck off strength* by the 134th Battalion to be transferred – on paper - to the 3rd Canadian Infantry Battalion (*Toronto Regiment*) already serving on the Continent since February of 1915. On the night of May 24-25 he crossed the English Channel, likely through the south-coast port of Southampton and the French industrial port-city of Le Havre situated on the estuary of the River Seine.



(Right above: *The French port-city of Le Havre at or about the time of the Great War – from a vintage post-card*)

From the docks on that May 25 he reported to *Rouelles Camp*, the Canadian General Base Depot in the same area. Private Dawe was one of only thirty-one arrivals there on that day and he was likely immediately put to work as in five days' time the Infantry Depot there was to be re-located in the vicinity of the town of Étapes, further up the coast.

On the day of his arrival, May 25, he had bureaucratically been taken on strength by the 3rd Battalion, but as will be seen, it appears that he may never have served in its ranks.

Private Dawe was now to spend some seventeen days at *Rouelles Camp* and then at Étapes before being despatched, possibly on June 10, to his new unit. *This*, however, was not to be the 3rd Canadian Infantry Battalion, but the 1st Entrenching Battalion* to which he had been temporarily assigned. He reported to this unit from the Base Depot on June 12, one of three-hundred eighty-one *other ranks* to do so on that day – one-hundred ten of which were *ostensibly* destined for the 3rd Battalion.



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(Preceding page: *Canadian troops from an unspecified unit engaged in road construction, this also being a job to which entrenching battalions were to be assigned – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)

****These units, as the name suggests, were employed in defence construction and other related tasks. They comprised men who not only had at least a fundamental knowledge and experience of such work but who also had the physique to perform it. However, these battalions also came to serve as re-enforcement pools where men awaiting the opportune moment to join their appointed unit might be gainfully employed for a short period of time.***

The 1st Entrenching Battalion at the time was stationed in a rear area near to the community of Villers-au-Bois, not quite twenty kilometres to the north-west of the battered medieval city of Arras. At the time, work was proceeding in a number of areas and on different projects: tramways, supply dumps, an airfield for the Royal Flying Corps and a rifle range, the work by both day and night.



(Right above: *The remnants of the Grande Place (Grand'Place) in Arras which had already been steadily bombarded for two years by the end of the year 1916 – from Illustration*)

(Right: *Villers Station Cemetery, Villers-au-Bois, is the last resting-place for just over one-thousand two-hundred Commonwealth military personnel and thirty-two former adversaries. – photograph from 2017*)



For those without gainful employment there was physical-training, infantry drills and perhaps a bath and, on the two – so as to accommodate *all* Battalion personnel - evenings following Private Dawe's arrival, a concert was given by the *Trench Concert Party* of the PPCLI.

*** * * * ***

Note - There now is some uncertainty as to the whereabouts of Private Dawe as neither his personal files nor the appropriate War Diaries appear to be complete.

It thus may well be that the author is about to reproduce errors that the authors of the original documents have recorded – be apprised.

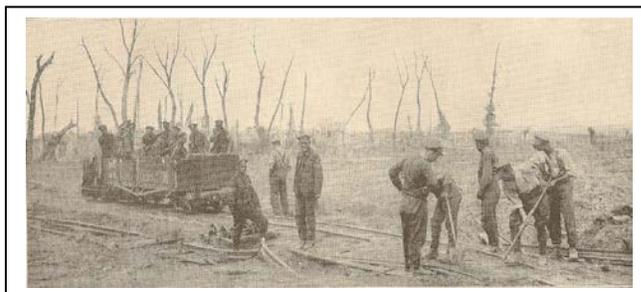
a) On July 15, 1917, the next entry in Private Dawe's file records his being...*attached to Canadian Corps Tramways Company*; however, the source of this information is neither the 1st Entrenching Battalion nor the 3rd Battalion, but simply the *Canadian Corps*. Thus one is not sure exactly *from* which unit Private Dawe was to be transferred, nor does one know if he was transferred physically on that date or simply bureaucratically – whether either to move or to remain *in situ*.

(continued)

b) The following entry was reported by the CCRC (*Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp*), at the time also stationed at Villers-au-Bois, which records simply 'Left for Unit'. It is dated September 25, 1917, only seven days after the CCRC officially came into being. There is no suggestion as to how Private Dawe found himself at the *Reinforcement Camp*, and no clue as to what the unit in question was for which he now apparently left.

c) On September 29 the Officer Commanding the 3rd Battalion recorded that, on September 25 (see b above)...*Attached Cdn. Corps Tramway Coy...* Was Private Dawe once again transferred physically or was the CO (Commanding Officer) simply confirming for some staff-officer's files the already-occurred transfer of July 15 (see a above) of Private Dawe? There appears to be no way to know which is correct.

d) Then, four months later, on January 28 and 29, appear on the same *Active Service Form* as do a), b), and c) above, the two following entries, the first reported on 30/1/18: ...*Transferred to Canadian Light Railway Construction Coy. 28/1/18*; and the second reported on 28/1/18 (sic): ...*TOS (Taken on Strength) of Cdn. L. Ry Construction Co on transfer from 3rd Cdn Inf Btn 29/1/18.*



But surely he had already been transferred away from the 3rd Battalion (according to c above) four months previous to this.

(Right above: *Canadian Corps Railway Troops constructing a light railway 'somewhere In France' – from Le Miroir or Illustration*)

In the meantime his pay records appear to have Private Dawe at least associated with the Canadian Corps Tramway Company on September 8, 1917; with the 3rd Battalion on October 10, 1917; back with the above Tramway Company on November 3 of 1917; the same CCTC on February 2 of 1918; the #2 Tramway Construction Company on March 1, 1918; the 56th Tramway Company in April, 1918; and the 64th Tramway Construction Coy in May of that same 1918.

There is yet a paucity of War Diaries available on the internet – or even anywhere - for many of the Canadian railway and tramway units. Thus the author will try to pick up the threads of Private Dawe's story with that of the 2nd Tramways Company which was to become the designation of the Canadian Light Railway Construction Company on November 23 of 1917 (see d above)*.

**Although the 2nd Tramways Company continued to use 'No. 2 Coy. CLRCC' in its Diary.*

From the information of several paragraphs above it appears that Private Dawe joined this unit on January 28 of the New Year, 1918...and he would also have, perhaps even prior to this moment, become Sapper Dawe.

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The 2nd Tramways Company had apparently been busy during that month of January, 1918, due not only to the routine tasks and duties imposed upon it but because of a thaw which had rendered the ground – and thus the railway lines laid upon it – prone to shifting and at times to collapse.

A pertinent part of the Company's War Diary reads as follows: *Week ending January 28, Re-ballasting, Ballasting, Widening cuts and ditching on the following lines: Pierre, le Brebis and Marqueffles.*

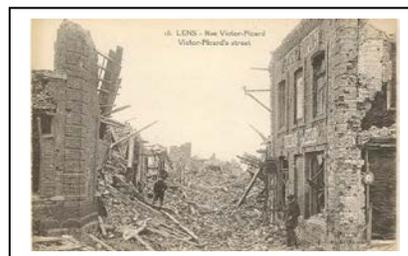
St. Pierre Cut-off 150 yds. Graded. Brique Spur 110 yds. graded. 110 yds. Track layed. 55 yds Ballasted. Rouge Spur 44 yds. Graded.

In that month the unit would handle twelve-thousand tons despite the difficult conditions.

Judging from the several place-names mentioned, the work of the 2nd Tramways Company on this occasion appears to have been in the outskirts and to the west and north-west of the city and mining-centre of Lens – Cité St-Pierre was a miners' district adjacent to a coal-pit – whereas Marqueffles is about a dozen kilometres to the west; le Brébis in near Mazingarbe, just to the north-west of Lens.



(Right above: *The mining village of Loos just to the north of Lens, its pit-head towers visible in the background – and known to British troops as 'Tower Bridge' – as it was already by the end of the year 1915 – from Le Miroir*)

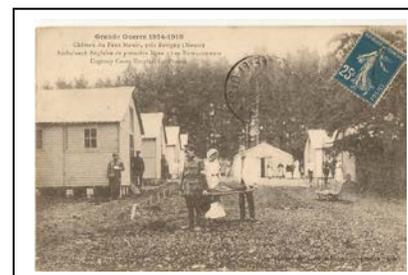


(Right: *After four years of constant bombardment – by both sides – the city of Lens looked like this at the conclusion of the conflict. – from a vintage post-card*)

The Canadians were to construct an impressive network of railways by the end of the *Great War*: tramways, light railways and standard-gauge track. They would haul such things as ammunition and ordnance, rations and water, engineering material, steel, brick, road-stone, personnel and myriad other items forward; on the return journeys there was often salvage, personnel and always the wounded – perhaps particularly stretcher-cases.

In the month of February, the ground firmer, the tonnage rose to just over seventeen-thousand tons; in March it was four-thousand tons more – but then there are three more days in the month of March.

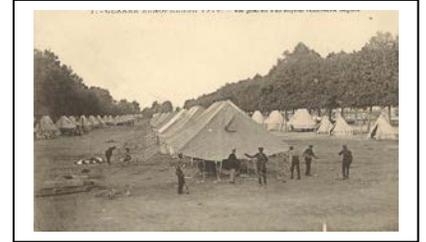
It was in April that Sapper Dawe became ill. On the 27th day of the month he was admitted into the 3rd Canadian Field Ambulance, established at the time at Agnez-les-Duisans and according to its Diary, well within range of enemy artillery. Almost immediately he was transferred further to the rear* and on to the 57th Casualty Clearing Station at Aubigny – some fifteen kilometres north-west along the main road to St-Pol, where he was diagnosed as suffering from bronchitis.



**Perhaps because the 14th and 16th Canadian Battalions were preparing a raid for that night and the Ambulance was expecting to be busy.*

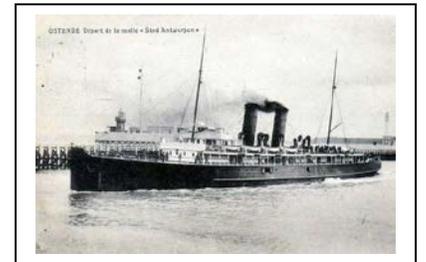
(Preceding page: A British field ambulance, of a more permanent nature than some – from a vintage post-card)

Private Dawe was not to remain long at Aubigny either – perhaps for the same reason – and later that same day he was placed on board the 34th Ambulance Train for the journey to Étaples and to the 26th General Hospital, one of many medical facilities established in the area, where he was admitted on the morrow, April 28.



(Right above: A British casualty clearing station – the one pictured here under canvas for mobility if and whenever the necessity were to arise – being established somewhere in France during the early years of the War: Other such medical establishments were often of a much more permanent nature. - from a vintage post-card)

By April 30, two days later, it had been decided that he be hospitalized in England. To that end on that day he was embarked onto the Belgian hospital ship *Stad Antwerpen* for the short cross-Channel journey.



(Right: The Belgian cross-Channel ferry Stad Antwerpen was to serve as a hospital ship from 1915 to 1919. The image appears to be pre-War. – image from The Library web-site)

While a report of the time reads as follows: *Sick transferred to England and posted to the Canadian Engineers Regimental Depot Seaford...that posting for the moment was only a bureaucratic one – on paper – signifying only that he was now the responsibility of that Regimental Depot (but see later).*

In fact, upon arrival in England he was to immediately be transferred to the County of Middlesex War Hospital at Napsbury where he was re-diagnosed as not only with bronchitis but also a severe case of laryngitis. His medical record documents that he was to remain for treatment at Napsbury for a total of fifty-three days*.

** The term –itis, of course, signifies an infection. In those days before the discovery and then implementation of anti-biotics, any infection was a cause for concern. In the case of any wound it was often more to be feared than the wound itself. Infections could take weeks and even months of medical attention to overcome, and – as soon was to be seen, in the Spanish ‘flu epidemic of 1918 – its cure was never to be taken for granted.*

Even after those fifty-three days his rehabilitation was still to come. For this he was transferred on June 21 of that 1918 to the Canadian Convalescent Hospital at Woodcote Park, Epsom, the town a well-known horse-racing centre in the county of Surrey. There he remained in care for a further thirty-four days, until, having been declared as...*fit for duty*...on July 17, he was released a week later, on July 24.

Sapper Dawe was now once more transferred, on this further occasion to the 3rd Canadian Command Depot at Seaford-on-Sea. However, he likely was not to report there until August 3 as, upon his discharge from Epsom, he had been granted the customary ten-day *sick-furlough*. Where he was to spend this time has not been recorded, but Epsom is only a short train-journey from London.



(Right above: *The area around Marble Arch, although in today's Greater London, is in fact sited in the City of Westminster. It is seen here as it was in 1913, just prior to the Great War. – from a vintage post-card*)

Once having reported to the 3rd Canadian Command Depot*, Sapper Dawe was to perform *light duties* there for just over a month when, on September 5, he was sent to the above-mentioned 2nd Canadian Engineers Regimental Depot, also to be found at the Canadian complex at Seaford.

**A command depot was a centre for military personnel who were not attached to a particular unit, often, but not necessarily, after release from hospital. While he was there it was decided by the authorities exactly what future, if any, the soldier in question had in the Armed Forces.*

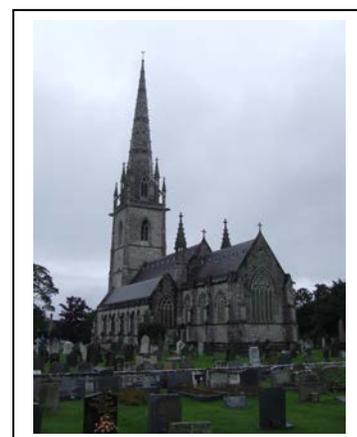
Whether Sapper Dawe at this point expected a return to *active service* on the Continent is not known; but in any case, this was not to be. He was still serving at the Regimental Depot at Seaford when the Armistice of November 11, 1918, brought the *Great War* to its conclusion.

The collapse of the German government and the abdication of the Kaiser came as a surprise to most, including the German Army. And while that may be *another* story, it may also explain why the repatriation of overseas troops was not to be as efficient as it might have been – it would not be until the late summer of 1919 that the majority of troops had returned to Canada*.

**The last such ship to leave Liverpool was 'Carmania' which sailed on February 18, 1920.*

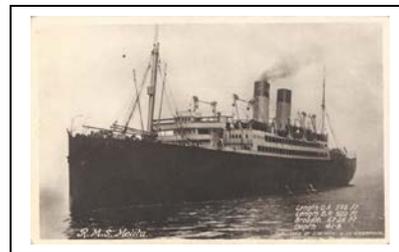
It would therefore appear that the repatriation of Sapper Dawe had already been organized before that date: on December 2, 1918, he was despatched to the *Kemmel Park Demobilization Camp* at Rhyl, North Wales – it to become notorious for a riot among the troops in March of 1919 during which five were killed and twenty-three badly hurt – to await transport back to Canada. He was to take ship eight days later, on December 10.

(Right: *Bodelwyddan (St. Mary's) Churchyard, in which lie the victims of the Kemmel Park riot and others, including a soldier of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment who died of pneumonia while awaiting repatriation – photograph from 2011*)



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The vessel on which he was to travel was the newly-launched *Melita*, recently purchased by the *Canadian Pacific Steamship Line*. She sailed from Liverpool on that December 10, to dock in St. John, New Brunswick*, eight days later.



**The only other major ice-free port on Canada's east coast was Halifax. But her facilities were still in the throes of being repaired even a year after the horrendous explosion of December 6, 1917.*

(Right above: *The ship Melita had been laid down in a Scottish ship-yard in 1913 for the German Hamburg Line but the Great War was to intervene. Eventually launched in 1917 and bought by Canadian Pacific, she had made her maiden voyage in January of 1918. – from the 'Great Ships – Melita' web-site)*

Upon his arrival in St. John on December 18, 1918, Sapper Dawe was *taken on strength* by the Military District Number 2, headquartered in Toronto but which also included the city of Hamilton. Thus over the course of the following three days he was to travel by train to Toronto from New Brunswick. Upon his arrival in that city he was granted a two-week period of leave, from December 21 until January 4 of the New Year, although where he was to spend that time is not recorded.

Upon his return to *Demobilization Camp* in Toronto after leave, he was examined on January 15 a propos his intentions after his final discharge. On the form he stated only that he intended to return to 68, Crooks Street in Hamilton of which the author has found no record – except that today it appears to exist as a newer building. A hand-written note found in the file and also dated January 15, registers the presence of some slightly-abnormal sounds in his lungs although with no accompanying disability (also see immediately below).

On the morrow, January 16, there was a medical examination destined for...*officers and other ranks who have no disability*. On it, however, Sapper Dawe indicated that he had incurred respiratory problems, recorded his medical history and stated that...*Has slight cough sometimes at night*.

Then on January 21, 1919, Sapper Dawe was discharged. He apparently left service on that day with his pay for fifty-two days, field-allowance for fifty-two days, a clothing allowance and the previous balance from his account: a total of \$104.20.

From this point forward the military appears to have kept few, if any, documents. Nor do his whereabouts appear to have been recorded in the 1921 Census.

Bertram Dawe is recorded as having died in the Mountain Sanatorium* in Hamilton, from pulmonary tuberculosis, on February 23, 1921. The final medical report stated that his condition had been...*due to service*.

**Apart from tubercular cases, the facility also provided care for ex-soldiers suffering from the effects of gas.*

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The son of Samuel Dawe (*Daw*), fisherman, and of Patience Dawe (*née Morgan*) of Burnt Head, District of Port de Grave*, he was also brother to Arthur-William and to Eli – named as his next of kin in his papers**.

**Perhaps he was the Samuel Dawe deceased from consumption, on September 14, 1902, and she the Patience Dawe deceased, also from consumption, a single month later, on October 14, 1902. Both were from Burnt Head.*

***To his aunt Mrs. Julia Ellis (see further above) – her address also given as 89, McGill Street, Hamilton – Private Dawe had allocated, as of August 1, 1916, a monthly twenty dollars from his pay.*

Bertram Dawe had enlisted at the *apparent* age of twenty-three years and two months: date of birth at Cupids or Burnt Head, Newfoundland, October 25, 1892 (from attestation papers and the Newfoundland Birth Register).

Sapper Bertram Dawe was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

