

HISTORY DETECTIVE

RESEARCH & COMPLETE THIS
GLOUCESTERSHIRE SOLDIER'S
PROFILE.



NAME: IVOR BERTIE GURNEY

D.O.B:

PLACE OF BIRTH:

REGIMENT:

RANK:

CIVILIAN OCCUPATION:

Find out:

Why was Gurney considered unsuitable for military service in 1914?

What did Gurney's regiment's badge look like? Make a copy below.



GEOGRAPHY & BIOGRAPHY

From an early age, Ivor Gurney was heavily involved in music and regularly sang at **Gloucester Cathedral**. He began composing whilst quite young and set poems to music of his own. By the time he was in his teens he was very accomplished and earned himself a place at The Royal College of Music.

Gurney's first collection of poems called 'Severn and Somme' was published in 1917 whilst he was in the trenches. It reflected his experiences in the war, but also his love for the Gloucestershire countryside. More than anything, it seems, Gurney longed to be in the **Cotswold Hills** or sailing the **River Severn** at **Framilode** with his best friend Herbert Howells.

He found it very hard to carry on writing music whilst he was serving as a soldier. The constant noise, horrific experiences and difficulty getting basic equipment (such as paper) at the front, made it almost impossible, but he still produced some fantastic work.

Twice, Gurney was badly wounded in the war. He survived however and returned home at its end. His mental health (always fragile), had suffered. He found it hard to settle and became depressed. To help, he spent much time outdoors walking (often at night) in places he'd longed for whilst in France: **Stroud valley, Syde, Crickley Hill, Tewkesbury, Minchinhampton, Cranham** and **Redmarley**. Sadly, his illness got the better of him and he spent the last 15 years of his life in an asylum in Dartford. He died in 1937 and is buried at **Twigworth** in St. Matthew's churchyard - returning at last to his beloved Gloucestershire.

TASK: On a map of Gloucestershire, find and mark some of these places that Gurney knew well.

To His Love by Ivor Gurney

He's gone, and all our plans
 Are useless indeed.
 We'll walk no more on Cotswold
 Where the sheep feed
 Quietly and take no heed.

His body that was so quick
 Is not as you
 Knew it, on Severn river
 Under the blue
 Driving our small boat through.

You would not know him now...
 But still he died
 Nobly, so cover him over
 With violets of pride
 Purple from Severn side.

Cover him, cover him soon!
 And with thick-set
 Masses of memoried flowers –
 Hide that red wet
 Thing I must somehow forget.

This poem was written in 1917 whilst Gurney was serving in France. It reveals his reaction to devastating news that his best friend had been killed in action*. One of the things that kept Gurney going was looking forward to after the war when he and his friend could revisit the Gloucestershire places where they loved to walk, sail and write.

TASK:

- Gurney saw lots of **terrible sights in the war** which he captured in his poems. Which lines in this poem suggest he was haunted by thoughts of his friend being horribly wounded before he died?
- Contrastingly, Gurney's poem also contains some **idyllic images of home**. Highlight the image you think is the most beautiful, peaceful or effective depiction of home. Can you explain why it is a good one?

* To his great joy, Gurney later found out that his friend had not been killed was a prisoner of war.



The following transcript is of extracts from Ivor Gurney's letter on arrival in France in 1915. It is to his friend Mrs. Catherine Abercrombie and recalls the details of his arrival on front line. At this point, Gurney could only hear guns and distant bombardments, but he hadn't yet experienced a full attack. The Welsh soldiers he met in his dugout in the trench were clearly still terrified by the previous night's attack and were dreading the next one. The extracts show Gurney's thoughts on what he sees and who he meets, but also on something beautiful and familiar that he hears. Notice however, that even this becomes something ugly and spoilt by the war.

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... we were marched here and put in trenches with another battalion for instruction. They were Welsh mostly and personally I feared rather a rough type. But, oh the joy, I crawled into a dugout, not high but fairly large, lit by a candle and so met four of the most delightful young men that could be met anywhere. Thin faced and bright eyed, their faces showed beautifully against the soft glow of candlelight, and their musical voices delightful after the long march at attention in silence...

They spoke of their friends dead or maimed in the bombardment, a bad one, of the night before, and in the face of their grief I sat there and for once self-forgetful, more or less, gave them all my love, for their tenderness, their steadfastness and kindness...

Once, we were standing outside our dugout cleaning mess tins when a cuckoo sounded its call from the shattered wood at the back. What could I think of but Framilode, Minsterworth, Cranham and the old haunts of home.

This Welshman turned to me passionately 'Listen to that damned bird,' he said. 'All through that bombardment in the pauses I could hear that infernal silly 'cuckoo, cuckoo' sounding whilst Owen was lying in my arms covered with blood. How shall I ever listen again...!' He broke off, and I became aware of shame at the unholy joy that had filled my artist's mind and what a fine keen face he had, and what a voice – for speaking I mean...

But I can hardly write a coherent letter as you may guess. Never did I have such material, and never o never was writing paper so dear; ... it is impossible to read much in this new environment ... But could Abercrombie see the little white puffs of the encircling aeroplanes – Germans high, British low – could he but see ... ah...

By God I want to come out of this safe, discipline my nerves and mind into a normal sanity, and do my best in some sympathy to praise these men as they deserve; if it were possible...

I shall write no more, even to such an interesting correspondent as yourself. Partly because of the huge price of bearable writing paper, partly because of the amount legitimately to be said.

I send my love to the children and assure them that when this all over, they with the rest of the children in Blighty will probably have no end of good times ...

Good bye and best wishes and kisses and corollary endearments to the children,
Yours very sincerely,
Ivor Gurney.

TASK 1:

Imagine you are a soldier from Gloucestershire who has just arrived in the trenches. Write a short diary entry which captures your first few hours in your new surroundings.

TASK 2:

Using your history detective skills and some of what Gurney has written, research what a dugout would have looked like. Can you recreate a scale model of one inside a shoebox?