

LIEUTENANT JOHN ENGLISH LOTT MC (1888-92)

Date of Birth	April 1875 in Great Wenham, Essex
School Information	Brother of Charles Giblin Lott (1888-90) . Prefect. Goldsmith Prize 1891.
Career Information	Brother of Charity, member of the Anglican Order of St Paul.
Date Of Death	21 May 1917
Cause of Death	Died of gun shot wound to the head received on 7 May 1917
Location	La Vacquerie, France
Cemetery	La Chapelette British & Indian Cemetery at Peronne in Somme, France
Rank	Lieutenant
Branch of Service	Royal Engineers

He was awarded the Military Cross on 26 July 1917 "For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. A party went out to recover the body of a comrade and came under heavy fire, which wounded all the men of the party. This officer went to their assistance, helped to dress their wounds and carried them to a place of safety. This was carried out under continuous shell fire."

In October 2014 there was an OF visit to his grave







In the Summer 2005 edition of The Ranger (the Journal of the Defence Surveyors Association), the following extensive article under the heading 'A Monk Goes Sound Ranging' was published. It makes fascinating reading.

A Monk goes Sound Ranging

By Tony Grange-Bennett

The Somme, 1916. Sound-ranging Section 'R' had laid out its base running 4,000 yards south of Hébuterne and opposite the German fortified village of Serre with its HQ located in an orchard on the edge of Courcelles-au-Bois. The section only had one survey post and this was positioned in a corner of a field south-east of La Signy Farm. The view from the survey post looked down the slope to the four cosses standing in front of Serre. On 1 July 1916 this area became one of the great killing grounds of the Somme battle as the gallant Pals Battalions attacked towards Serre and were mown down in their hundreds. The noise of battle was so great that the ineffectual Driancourt carbon microphones being used by 'R' Section were unable to provide the section with any German gun locations and the observers in their survey post must have looked on helplessly. And one of those observers, Lance Corporal John Lott, must surely have reflected on the irony of his situation, for John Lott was a Monk - a Brother of Charity - and by some strange quirk of fate the four cosses that were in his view

were known to the British Army by the gospel names of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. What circumstances had brought this gentle monk to this terrible location?.....

John English Lott had been born in Ashen House in Ashen, a small village in Essex, in 1875 and was the elder son of a yeoman farmer. The census of 1881 shows that at that time his father, John Green Lott, was farming 235 acres and employing 7 men and 8 boys. The early years of John English Lott would have been spent on the farm and during this period he will have started to acquire the range of practical skills that were to serve him well in later life.

John's early education, together with that of his two brothers and two sisters, was conducted at home by Miss Harris, the governess. In 1888, he became a boarder at Framlingham College where he demonstrated that he was an able scholar by winning the prestigious "William Goldsmith Scholarship". He became a school prefect and, like other public schoolboys of his era, he will also have absorbed to the full the concepts of patriotism and loyalty to the crown.

In 1892, John Lott left Framlingham College and went to work in a bank. The fact that he chose a career in banking strongly suggests that he possessed numerate skills to a high level. In 1896 or early 1897, the young Lott attended a service in a City church and heard a sermon delivered by the Reverend Charles Plomer Hopkins, more usually known as Father Michael, a powerful and persuasive preacher. In dramatic fashion this sermon was to change John Lott's life completely and utterly.

As a young man, Father Michael had gone out to the mission fields and had soon adopted the cause of merchant seamen who found themselves facing major difficulties in the river ports of the Indian subcontinent. This cause was to become his life's work. Initially, he operated the Seamen's Friendly Society, which developed first into the Society of St. Paul and then in 1891 into the religious Order of St Paul (OSP). In 1894 he arranged for a house to be established in Barry, South Wales, as a base in the UK for recruitment, training and administration, and also as a rest home for unemployed or aged sailors. This was soon found to be somewhat inadequate and in 1895 it was decided to build a Mother House for the Order at Alton in Hampshire. Father Michael returned to England and set to work with energy and determination to raise the financial support that he needed in order to found the Mother House that was to become Alton Abbey. He preached widely all over the country and was able to attract recruits or novices including John Lott who resigned his position at the bank and joined the Order on 1 November 1897.

The site of his new Abbey was a completely undeveloped site without even a reliable source of water, situated in rural isolation about two miles south of Alton. Initially, to provide some living accommodation, corrugated iron huts were constructed in the wood. Such was the situation that John Lott found when he arrived as Novice or Aspirant in 1897. Two years later, he took his vows and became a 'professed' member of the Order. As a Monk or Brother of Charity, he became known as Brother John Baptist Lott, O.S.P., or just Brother John. In the years that followed, he was to become a key figure in the building of Alton Abbey and in the life of the Community. The Abbey archives show that Brother John was a man of remarkable all-round abilities who successfully took on a host of different roles - running the farm, building the Abbey, writing for the magazine, fund-raising and so on. When specific problems arose, he often seems to have acted in a capacity that would now be known as a trouble-shooter and there seems little to which he could not turn his hand.

On the outbreak of war in 1914 Father Michael decided that he would formally release all the Brothers from their vows of obedience to the Order so that they were free to enlist in the Armed Forces if they wished. John Lott, who was then 39 years old, was one of the first to volunteer, choosing the 21st Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers - the 4th Public Schools Battalion - which he joined 11 November 1914 as a Private.

John Lott landed in France with the battalion on 14 November 1915. Three weeks later, he received a slightly odd posting as he was attached to the 176th Tunnelling Company RE which was employed on operations in the Givenchy-Cuinchy sector. The tunnelling companies were supported by temporarily attached infantrymen, drawn from a variety of units to act as labourers and this seems likely to have been John Lott's role. The tunnelling companies were not solely involved in mining activities, although this was, of course, their main purpose. They were also involved on a range of other work including the digging of saps, trenches for cabling, subways, dugouts for signals and other purposes. John Lott's considerable experience of construction work that he had acquired at Alton Abbey is likely to have stood him in good stead and made him a valued member of his

unit. In March 1916, he was transferred to 173rd Tunnelling Company RE working in the Hulluch-Double Crassier sector. This sector was in the coal mining areas to the west of Lens. The Double Crassier consisted of two long parallel mounds of mining spoil across which the German trenches cut at right angles.

The 21st Battalion Royal Fusiliers was disbanded on 24 April 1916 with many of the men being commissioned. Lott applied for a commission but was not accepted. Instead, he was transferred to the 26th Battalion Royal Fusiliers (the Bankers Battalion), but continued to work with 173rd Tunnelling Company. It is hardly surprising if he was feeling somewhat jaded when he wrote to his friend, Brother George Columba Smith, at the end of April 1916:

"Very many thanks for your letter for my birthday. I am having a pretty hard time just now & not much opportunity of writing. You will have heard that my commission application failed on account of age. I may be able to have a further try later on.

"The water here is all of doubtful purity. In fact it all has to be treated with chemicals - chlorinated they call it. As I don't want to get sick by anything of that sort & one can get water sometimes apart from regulation supply will you get me some tablets from Boots or other chemists. They supply them as I have seen them advertised. I would also be glad if you could send me bivouac cocoa tablets & a small solidified methylated cooker. This colliery place is full of dust when mud dries up. It would be fearfully hot here today were it not for the strong wind that is blowing."

However, shortly after he had posted this letter word must have reached him of a possible opportunity to obtain a transfer out of the mining company and on 16 May 1916 he wrote:

"Sorry I was not able to write just as your parcel arrived before we went to trenches last time & this time I have been very busy with a matter I hope will mature eventually with my transfer into a Survey Company."

Lott's busy activities on his own behalf had a successful outcome as he was posted to the 4th Field Survey Company on 9 June 1916 and became a sound ranger. If Lott was pleased to have obtained his transfer, it is very likely also that the 4th Field Survey Company was equally pleased to have obtained such a dependable and experienced recruit as the acquisition of the right calibre of men had long been an ongoing problem for the survey companies.

The company was formed in late February 1916 under the command Captain (later Major-General) Malcolm Neynoe MacLeod RE, as part of the Fourth Army HQ. Two sound ranging sections, 'S' and 'R,' joined the 4th FSC at the end of March. Macleod's first problem was to obtain competent officers and men to handle the highly technical aspects of his survey company. Efforts were made to recruit scientists and academics from the UK, but to fill his establishments he was obliged to circularise other Army units asking them to submit the names of officers and men considered suitable for the various duties. It seems highly likely that the 26th Royal Fusiliers put forward the name of Lance-Corporal John Lott. On the 4th of June 1916, on a form signed by MacLeod, John Lott joined the 4th FSC and became a sound ranger and it seems clear that he joined 'R' Section. The sound ranging units were unconventional, not only in the form of their organisation, but also in the way they were run. Very likely, John Lott was well suited to this unconventionality. In his book "Flash Spotters and Sound Rangers," John R Innes tells us that it was usual for the men to stay in one post or in one section for quite a long time and that they lived a real 'communal' life. 'Communal' is an interesting choice of word and it has to be appropriate for a Monk! Innes also talks about 'the old men' and says that there were a good many with the Survey and that they were always an inspiration and example to the younger men.

In letters to his friends in England, Lott provides them with some information about his duties. In one letter he writes:

"I am quite well and intact. My work, about which I am unable to tell you, is very interesting, and requires my living in a dugout about half a mile from the German front. I am in dugout 3 days, and then go to our camp about an hour's walk in rear for the 4th day. There are 4 of us on this duty, one man going to camp each day, leaving 3 on duty. I have not lived in a building for about three months. In tent or dugout all the time. The camp is situated in an orchard, which is very nice."

In another letter he reports that he was "writing in a dugout 17 feet below surface, shells were whistling overhead, and several had fallen nearby, but, beyond being smothered in dirt, he and his comrades in the dugout had so far been untouched."

Clearly Lott in is an observation post but in itself the information provided by him would not be sufficient to identify his location with any accuracy. However, fortunately it corresponds closely with the descriptions written after the war by Lieutenant P Rothwell of 'R' Section about his section's first base on the Somme in 1916. It is not difficult to see that he and Lott are both writing about the same place as Rothwell tells us that:

"The Section's HQ was first established in a farmhouse in the centre of Courcelles-au-Bois, but the enemy soon put incendiary shells into it and burnt it down. This necessitated a move to a more open position at the north edge of the village..... in an orchard". Lott mentioned an orchard in his letter.

"The Section's first observation post lay under a hedge corner just south of La Signy Farm, facing Serre..... It was approached over a crest from Colincamps by way of a communication trench. It was a perilous matter to leave the trench, for the slope was frequently swept with premature shrapnel from our own field guns, whose shells just cleared the crest with an excruciating din." As was related in the opening paragraph of this article, the Observation Post had a view of the slope leading down to the front-line in front of the cosses, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and the point has already been made that it was a strange coincidence that John Lott, the Monk, should find himself observing the bitter fighting around the four cosses with the gospel names.

'R' section was transferred to the 5th Field Survey Company in the new 5th Army on 19 July 1916 and Lott went with them. Later in the autumn, he was selected for special training with 'W' Section, but in October he was taken ill with influenza and did not return to duty until the end of the month. On 1 November, he was promoted Corporal. At this stage, he made a second application for a commission and it seems likely that he was encouraged to do this by his former OC as MacLeod signed his application with a special request that he be posted to 4th FSC. This second application was approved and on 29 December, 2nd Lieutenant JE Lott reported for duty with 4th FSC and joined 'S' Sound Ranging Section. It seems reasonable to assume that he took the position of Officer I/C Forward Observers.



In early 1917, the Germans withdrew to the Hindenberg Line and delays occurred before the sound ranging sections came forward to take up new positions but by the beginning of May 1917, 'S' Section was established on a new base running north to south from Havrincourt Wood to Villers Guislain with its HQ near Gouzeaucourt. This was part of the 8th Division's front.

Its two survey posts would have been about 1,000 yards from the front line. Fierce fighting took place on this section of the front on 5 May when the 8th Division launched an attack on La Vacquerie. This was the last offensive action by the Division before it went into reserve ten days later. On 7 May 1917, John Lott may have been in one of the survey posts or somewhere in the vicinity when he saw a party of soldiers hit by fire, which wounded all the men of the party. Lott immediately went out and started to bring in the wounded even though the area was still under continual shellfire. A piece of shrapnel pierced his steel helmet and penetrated his brain. Severely wounded, he was carried back to safety and rushed to 55 Casualty Clearing Station near Péronne.

Two days later, a telegram was sent by 55 Casualty Clearing Station to the War Office with the brief message: "2 Lt. J.E. Lott. G.S.W. Head." It was not until 13 May that the War Office sent a telegram to his father, John Green Lott, then living at Colchester. This telegram read: "Regret to inform you that 55 C.C.S. reports 8th May 1917 2/Lt. J.E. Lott, 4th F.S. Coy, R.E. dangerously wounded 7th May. Gunshot wound head. Further news will be sent when received."

Clearly, John Green Lott did not feel that the notification had been sent to him with adequate expedition and he raised his concerns with the War Office who replied to him on 14 May:

"Military Secretary presents his compliments to Mr Lott and regrets delay in notifying him that his son, 2 Lieut. J.E. Lott was wounded. This delay was due to the fact that no next-of-kin had been registered for this officer and that same had to be obtained from the Records Office, Hounslow, which naturally occupied a few days in so doing. Directly any further news is received of his son it will be communicated to Mr. Lott at once." (N.B. In fact, the telegram to the Records Office had not been sent until 12 May).

On 18 May and again on the 22 May, the War Office sent further telegrams to JG Lott saying that his son's condition was unchanged. Then, on 23 May, JG Lott received a tragic final telegram from the War Office:

"Deeply regret to inform you that 2 Lt. J.E. Lott, R.E., 4th F.S. Coy. died of wounds 21st May 1917. The Army Council express their sympathy."

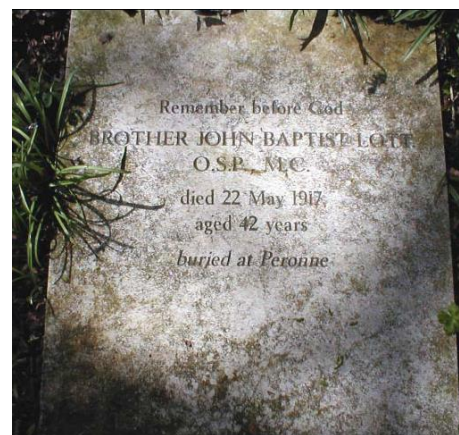
The telegrams seem to suggest that John Lott may never have recovered consciousness. For his actions on 7 May 1917 the award of the M.C. was approved and a local chaplain pinned the ribbon of the medal on his breast a few hours before he died of his wounds. The citation for the M.C. reads:

"For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. A party went out to recover the body of a comrade and came under heavy fire, which wounded all the men of the party. This officer went to their assistance, helped to dress their wounds and carried them to a place of safety. This was carried out under continuous shellfire."

Brother of Charity - Hero on the Western Front. Perhaps the epitaph of this remarkable man should be that he died as he had lived - in the service of his God, his Country and his fellow men.



When he was buried, it was reported that his men had erected a substantial cross over his grave and this is very evident in the photograph of his original grave. Today, his grave in the La Chapelle British & Indian Cemetery at Péronne is marked with a CWGC headstone whilst a Memorial Stone lies in the cemetery at Alton Abbey next to the grave of Father Michael Hopkins, the founder of the Order of St. Paul. It was the author's chance discovery of this Memorial Stone that caused him to start his research into the life of Brother John Baptist Lott, O.S.P.



He is also remembered at Great Wenham church, on the memorial plaque on the church porch.



When the war ended, the Order of St. Paul was left with only four members. Father Michael died in 1922 and later the Order of St. Paul was absorbed into the Order of St. Benedict and it is members of this Order that are now in residence at Alton Abbey.

Acknowledgements:

I am indebted to Dom Andrew Johnson, OSB, the archivist at Alton Abbey, who made available to me his own research into the life of Brother John. Information from Canon J.A. Fitch, a nephew of John Lott, and from Ann Hoole, of Framlingham College, was also most useful. Details of John Lott's army service were obtained from the National Archives. Other books consulted included "Artillery's Astrologers" by Peter Chasseaud and "Tunnellers" by Capt. W. Grant Grieve. The trench maps shown were obtained from the "IWM Trench Map Archive on CD-ROM" published by the Naval & Military Press. John Lott's headstone in France was photographed by Dan Finnegan.

My thanks to a distant cousin of his, Alison Krohn, for providing some of the above details and for pointing me to the article in The Ranger. She also tells me that John English Lott's ancestors lived at Flatford (Valley Farm) and he was related to Willy Lott, whose house was painted by John Constable in 'The Haywain'.

Brian Bouchard (who lives in Ashted where members of 4th Battalion University and Public Schools (UPS) Men's Force were billeted whilst Woodcote Camp, Epsom, was being constructed) got in touch to say that "John Lott enlisted with the UPS to enter the 4th Battalion, with a service number P/S 2926 . Initially he would have been billeted in our village of Ashted. In common with many of his comrades his photograph was taken by David Knights-Whittome and the image is shown below with the kind permission of Sutton Archives. It was taken on 4 January 1915.

