



**Private**

# **William H Drury**

235122, 2/5<sup>th</sup> Bn., East Lancashire Regiment who died on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1917, aged 19

***Remembered with Honour***

*Barrow Hill and Staveley Memorials  
Tyne Cot Memorial Panel 77 to 79 and 163A*

George Drury and Emma Medlock were both born in the small village of Great Gransden, Huntingdonshire, where they met and married in 1878 and where their children Frederick Samuel, Sarah, Alice, Ernest Edward and Alfred John were born.

In 1891, Emma had remained in Great Gransden with the children whilst George and his younger brother Charles were working as coal miners in Warsop, Notts. A year later, Emma and the children had moved to Warsop to join George who was now employed as a surface banksman at a local colliery.

Five more children were born at Warsop: Elsie May, Oliver Amos, George Clarence, William Harold (1897) and Wilfrid Redvers.

Frederick had married Mary Ann Taylor in 1901 and both he and his wife also lived with the family at 6, Church Street, Warsop. Frederick and Ernest Edward worked "down the pit" whilst 13 year old Alfred worked as an agricultural boy.

By the time that William was 13 years old, the family had moved to live at 164, High Street, New Whittington. He had left school the previous year and was employed as a labourer at the Staveley Company's Ironworks where his father, George, and his brothers Ernest Edward and George Clarence worked. Siblings Alfred John, Elsie May, Oliver Amos and Wilfrid Redvers were all still living at home in the 5-roomed house although Alfred moved out soon afterwards when he married Edith Annie Clewley

When war was declared on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914, as the mother of 7 sons, Emma must have been very concerned for her children. The family had moved again and were now living at No.2 Barrow Hill on the top row of block cottages. William was working at the "Old Works" and attended the local Zion Primitive Methodist Chapel.

*Researched and written by Ann Lucas as part of the Barrow Hill: A Community Remembers project*

George Clarence was the first to enlist at Chesterfield on 5th September 1914. Ernest Edward, enlisted on 25th May 1915 and Alfred John enlisted with the Sherwood Foresters at Staveley on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1915.



George Clarence Drury

**George** enlisted on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1914 and initially served at home with the 9<sup>th</sup> Bn., Sherwood Foresters (Notts and Derbys Regiment). He was posted to Gallipoli on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1915 before being evacuated to Egypt in December. He remained in Egypt until his battalion was posted to France on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1916 where they were holding the line at Arras and were on continuous gas alert.

He had served for just 5 weeks when he was wounded on 9<sup>th</sup> August by a gun shot through both hips at Delville Wood on the Somme whilst “on loan” to another regiment. He was invalided back to England on 16th August and finally discharged as no longer fit for war service on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1917.

**Ernest** served as a Lance Corporal with the 6<sup>th</sup> Bn., King’s Own Royal Lancasters and was posted to Mesopotamia on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1916 where he served for the duration of the war. He was wounded in action on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 1917 during the advance on Kut with a gunshot wound to his chest and hospitalised at Amara. He re-joined his unit in September the same year and remained on active service until the battalion sailed for home in early 1919.



**Alfred** had been posted to the Reserve and is listed with several Sherwood Forester battalions, before being transferred to the 17<sup>th</sup> Bn., Yorkshire Regiment. He was again transferred on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1917 to work at his trade as a Blast Furnaceman at the Weardale Coal and Coke Company Ltd, Tudhoe Ironworks, Spennymoor where he remained until February 1919.

**Oliver** served with the North Staffordshire Regiment and was awarded both the British War and Victory Medals.

William Harold enlisted in February 1917, just after his brother George had been wounded. He was initially posted to two Sherwood Forester battalions (service numbers 268535 and 81496) before joining the 2/5<sup>th</sup> Bn., East Lancashire Regiment on March 15<sup>th</sup>. The Battalion was a second line Territorial Force attached to the 66<sup>th</sup> Division.

Having received just 9 weeks training, William embarked for France in May and took part in training for the Operations on the Flanders Coast before the battalion's first major combat, at the Battle of Poelcappelle, when the Division attacked in terrible conditions towards Passchendaele Village.

*On the evening of 8 October assault troops, severely hampered by the heavy going and drenching cold rain, laboured to their starting lines on the eight mile attack frontage. At zero-hour, 5.20am the following morning, exhausted and under strength British and Australian units attacked in atrocious conditions behind a ragged and inaccurate barrage. At the centre of the attack Brigades of the 66th and 49th Divisions met ferocious machine-gun fire from the undestroyed German pillboxes and shell hole defences on the forward slopes. 49th Division attackers, having floundered through the morass of the flooded Ravebeek, were additionally impeded by belts of barbed-wire and forward movement halted at 9.30am*



Ref: <http://www.cwgc.org>

*The battle for Poelcappelle, 9 October, was a shambles because of inadequate artillery, appalling weather, and breakdowns in communication. British casualties were very high and remained high for the rest of the month, the third worst month in terms of casualties throughout the war. Official estimates put British casualties at 110,000 for October 1917.*

Ref: <http://www.westernfrontassociation.com>

*“The Division attacked at 05:20, zero hour, with 2 two brigades. 198<sup>th</sup> Brigade attacked with 2<sup>nd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> Manchesters and 2<sup>nd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> East Lancs. The 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> East Lancs were in support and the 2<sup>nd</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> Manchesters in reserve. The assaulting troops immediately came under severe artillery and machine gun fire. The 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> East Lancs came under heavy fire from Hambourg Reboubt, which they attacked without success.”*

*“By midday it became apparent that the Brigade had only reached the first objective. Consolidation was begun. The remnants of 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> were pulled back to form a line behind the two front line battalions in anticipation of counter-attacks”*

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*“At dusk the enemy launched a counter-attack, which was repulsed by artillery and small-arms fire, the 2<sup>nd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> East Lancs being usefully employed.”*

*Ref: “Passchendaele, Day by Day”*

William Harold Drury was one of those killed in action on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1917 at the Battle of Poelcappelle. He was 19 years old. *“His comrades say that he was shot by a sniper, and died immediately.”*

An Officer wrote to his parents, George and Emma, saying, *“I am sorry to lose him, as he was always cheerful and ready and willing to take his share of duties.”*

Lance-Corporal Lightfoot, of the same platoon, said in his letter, *“I am very sorry to inform you that your dear son, Willie, met his death in action, during the big push. His death was instantaneous, and he suffered no pain at all. He was well liked by all and he was a good soldier.”*



William Harold Drury is remembered on the Tyne Cot Memorial and a memorial service for him was conducted at the Barrow Hill Primitive Methodist (Zion) Chapel by the Rev F. H. Brown.

Although William was awarded both the British War Medal and the Victory Medal, his Medal Roll Index Card notes that these were returned. George and Emma had moved to Chesterfield Avenue in Chesterfield by the end of the war and it is more than likely that the medals were unsuccessfully delivered to their previous home and sent back.

*Sources include:*

- 1. 1871-1911 England Census*
- 2. UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919*
- 3. British Army, WW1 Medal Rolls Index Cards 1914-1920*
- 4. UK, Commonwealth War Graves 1914-1921*
- 5. Derbyshire Times Newspaper*
- 6. Derbyshire Courier Newspaper*
- 7. British Army, WW1 Pension Records 1914-1920*
- 8. British Army, WW1 Service Records 1914-1920*
- 9. England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth/Marriage/Death Index 1837-1915*

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