

JOSEPH HENRY WILLIS

Corporal 8712



Joseph Henry Willis (known as Harry) was born in 1887 in Yealmpton, and baptised in St Bartholomew Church, Yealmpton on 2 October 1887. The 1901 Census records the residents of Higher Torre Cottage as being a cartman named James Tucker, his wife Priscilla, a son Henry aged 13 and a daughter Hilda aged 8.

He enlisted at Plymouth into the 8th (Service) Battalion, The Devonshire Regiment, which was attached to 14th (Light) Division. The Division remained in the UK for some time, as other units were given priority for manpower, equipment and training. Initially without arms or equipment of any kind, the division was not judged ready for battle until May 1915. Willis's memorial stone in St Bartholomew's churchyard at Yealmpton records him being wounded three times, the first being in March 1915. Perhaps this was due to an accident in training, since the battalion was still in the UK at this time.

The 8th Battalion arrived at Le Havre on 26 July 1915, and was attached to 20th Brigade in 7th Division. Known as "The Immortal Seventh" following the heroic defensive action at the First Battle of Ypres, the division was involved in the heaviest fighting on the Western Front, including the Battle of the Somme. It is likely to have been just before and again during this battle that Harry Willis was wounded for the second and third time – in May and November 1916.

At the time of his death, on 30 April 1917 aged 29, he was serving at the Devonshire Regiments Depot, The Town Barracks¹, Exeter, perhaps as an instructor.



The poem on his memorial stone reads:

NOBLY HE DID HIS DUTY
BRAVELY HE FOUGHT AND FELL
BUT THE SORROW OF THOSE THAT MOURN HIM
ONLY ACHING HEARTS CAN TELL;
WE KNOW TIS A SOLDIER'S HONOUR
FOR HIS COUNTRY'S CAUSE TO FALL
YET THE GLORY FADES IN THE DISTANCE
WHILE GRIEF FOR HIM BLINDS US ALL

¹ Now known as Higher Barracks in Exeter.