

## **William Henry North**

**Rifleman A/464, 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps**



Photograph from the  
Illustrated Roll of Honour  
*Buckinghamshire Examiner*

William Henry North's birth was registered in Pewsey, Wiltshire, in the September/December quarter of 1892. He was the fifth of eight children born to William and Lucy North of Wootton Rivers, Wiltshire, where he was baptised on Christmas Day 1892. William senior had also been born in Wootton Rivers and was a horseman on a farm in the 1911 Census. He had previously been a soldier until he contracted rheumatic fever and returned to live and work in the place of his birth. Lucy had been born in Torquay, Devon. They married on 16 September 1883 at St. John's Church, Wembley. Their children were Victor, Elsie, Edward, Minnie, William, George, Arthur and Horace.

In the 1911 Census William Henry was living with his sister, Elsie, her husband, Frederick Austin, and their one year old son, Harold, at Amersham Common and both William and Frederick were working as domestic gardeners. At one stage he was employed at Hollybush Nurseries.

William was a keen cyclist and a member of the Cestreham Cycling and Athletic Club before he enlisted. He won a medal in the last road race before the war. This was the 25 miles Cycle Road Final for the Kelham Shield, which was held on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> June 1914. The club's records reported that the roads were bad for the first 5 miles, but the weather was fair. William came first in the Handicap. His sister was making enquiries about the medal at the time she received the news of her brother's death. The family was then living at 8 Manor Cottages, Bois Lane, Chesham Bois. Prior to this, he had competed in the 1600m Olympic Novice Trial at an evening meeting at Cricket Meadow, Chesham, on Saturday 30 August 1913, where he came third, and also in a 1 mile race in Chesham on 30 May 1914.

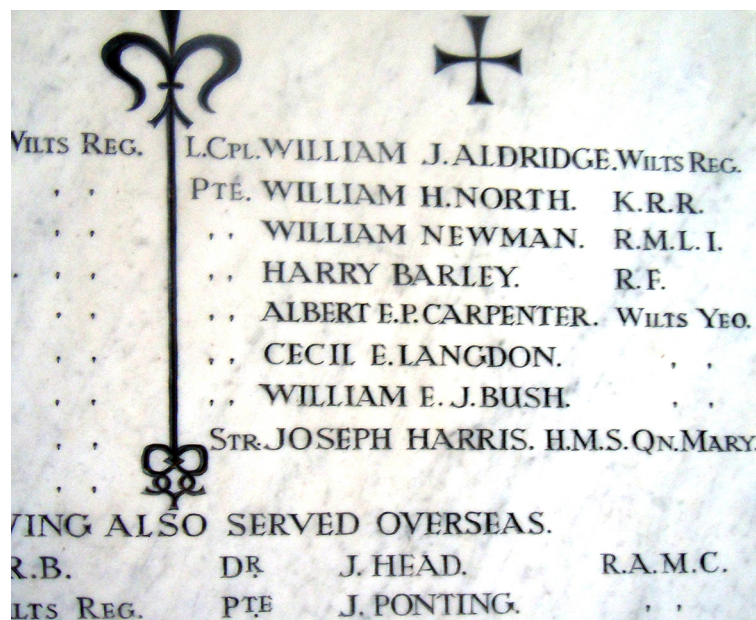
On 15 August 1914, William Henry North signed his attestation papers in London for enlistment for short service (3 years) in the army as a rifleman. His age was given as 19, although he was actually 21. He was described as being five feet two and a half inches tall, with a thirty-three and a half inch chest. His complexion was sallow, his eyes blue and his hair black. His regimental no. was A/464, 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps. He was posted on 25 August 1914. The battalion was formed at Winchester on 21 August 1914 as part of Kitchener's First Army (K1) and came under the orders of the 41<sup>st</sup> Brigade in the 14<sup>th</sup> (Light) Division. They then moved to Aldershot, going on to Grayshott in November and in February 1915 to Bordon, returning to Aldershot in March 1915. In May 1915 they landed in Boulogne. Within 6 weeks Private North would be dead.

From the closing May days of **the Battle of Ypres** in 1915 to the September opening of the **Battle of Loos** and the French attacks in Champagne, there was no general change in the situation on the Western Front. It was a period of static warfare, where the army suffered average losses of 300 men a day from sniping and shellfire. William was killed in action in France on 3 July 1915 aged 23. His death was reported in a letter to his father from his commanding officer, Major Seymour. William and others had been in a small ruined building making tea, when a German shell came through the roof. He was struck in the head and legs and killed instantaneously. Two of his comrades were killed by the same shell. Major Seymour wrote that they had buried the three of them on the evening of 3 July and the chaplain had conducted a simple but impressive service. He was not allowed to tell Mr North at that stage where his son was buried, but wrote "... the place is carefully registered, in order that you should know when better times come. We have put a wooden cross over the grave, with his name and the date on it". He went on to say "Rifleman North always did his duty well, not only well but cheerfully, and I feel his loss".

He was awarded The Allied Victory Medal, The British War Medal, 1914-18 and The 1914-15 Star.

The Star was sent to his father at 1 Bank Cottage, Wootton Rivers, Marlborough, Wiltshire in 1919. His effects, consisting of a broken mirror, a pencil case, letters and photographs had been forwarded to his father in November 1915 by his Commanding Officer.

William Henry North is remembered with Honour in  
Ypres Reservoir Cemetery, Belgium, grave reference IV.E.18,  
and on the memorial in St. Andrew's Church, Wootton Rivers.



Memorial, St. Andrew's Church, Wootton Rivers (Photo: Anne Swift).

**Sources:**

England & Wales Christening Records, 1530-1906 (Ancestry)  
*Buckinghamshire Examiner*, 16 July 1915; 6 Aug. 1915; 15 Oct. 1915; 15 Dec. 1916  
Anne Swift, Churchwarden, St. Andrew's Parish Church, Wootton Rivers, Wilts.  
British Army WW1 Service Records, 1914-1920 (Ancestry)  
Cestreham Cycling and Athletic Club: Sports Entries 1902-1914 (held at Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies)