

William Edward Latham Age 19

William Edward Latham was born in Uplowman near Tiverton Devon in 1896. In 1901 the census shows that William was living in a house next to the school in Uplowman with his mother and two younger children, brother Cyril and sister Christina. Their father William was listed as being a reservist who had been called up – probably for service in the Boer War.

By 1911, the family had moved to Bineham Cottage, Knole. William Latham Snr was working as a groom and gardener. There were three children at home, Christine (13), Cyril (12) and Roy (7). William had left home and was working as an office boy for a public works department in Southampton. He was lodging at 38, Richmond Road with his aunt and uncle. His uncle is listed as a timekeeper at a public works establishment, so it seems likely that he had arranged William's placement there.

William joined the 1st Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment and his medal record shows that he was posted to France in mid-April 1915. He held the rank of Lance Corporal, but at his death he is listed as a Lance Sergeant. Almost certainly he took part in the battles in April and May of 1915 in which his battalion were involved.

William was killed on the first day of the Battle of Albert which lasted for almost two weeks from 1st July 1916. In this phase of the Battle of the Somme the great attack began on a 25 mile front.

The Hampshires were to attack north of Beaumont Hamel where defences were particularly strong. At 7.20am, 10 minutes before zero hour, a large mine was blown up under the German defences at Hawthorn Ridge. This gave away the exact time of the attack. After the heavy guns stopped firing, the Germans had ample time to man their positions after being in deep undamaged dugouts.

The Hampshires (leaving their trenches at 7.40) followed the East Lancashires who had already been almost wiped out. Very few Hampshires made it to the wire. Although a few were reported to have reached the German line, the majority were brought down at or short of the wire. The survivors could only seek the shelter of the shell holes which pitted No Man's Land where they had to lie for hours until darkness fell. This was the 1st Hampshires' worst experience of the war. It had cost them 11 officers and 310 men killed and missing, 15 officers and 250 men wounded.

William Latham is buried at Redan Ridge, to the north of Beaumont-Hamel village; it was named from The Redan, a group of British front-line trenches of 1916. The cemetery was made in the spring of 1917, when these battlefields were cleared. There are over 250, 1914-18 war casualties commemorated in this site. Of these, over 100 are unidentified. All fell (with one exception) in July and November, 1916.