

William Denning Age 23

William Herbert Augustus Munckton Denning (sometimes Dening) was born on 25th July 1893 and baptised on 25th March 1894 at Holy Trinity. He was the son of Abi Bessie Denning of Knole. Abi was probably about 19 years old when William was born and unmarried.

At the time of the 1891 census her family were living in Knole and she was working as a servant at Bineham House. (A son of the household was 21 years old and his name was William Munckton.) By 1901 she was working as a domestic servant for Joseph and Marion Lang in Curry Rivel and the following year married Charles Powers.

Like many children born in similar circumstances, William lived with his grandmother Mary Denning at Knole. She had moved from Broadwindsor where, after early widowhood, she had worked as a dairy manager. By the time of the 1901 census she is recorded as living 'on her own means' with her son Ephraim age 29 (an agricultural labourer) and William age seven. The 1911 census shows William still living in Knole and working as a carter on a farm. His grandmother and uncle had moved, probably to Catsgore, so William was living as a boarder with William White, an old age pensioner.

William enlisted early in the war and by the time of his death had achieved the rank of Corporal. He joined the 10th Battalion, Devonshire Regiment and his medal record suggests that he was with them when the battalion landed at Boulogne on 23rd September 1915. However it soon moved on to Salonika via embarkation at Marseilles. On 26th December 1915, units began to move from Lembet to Happy Valley Camp and were in place there by February 1916. The Salonika Force dug-in until the summer of 1916, by which time they had been joined by Serbian, Russian and Italian units. The action was hampered throughout by widespread and unavoidable sickness and by continual diplomatic and personal differences with neutrals or Allies. Further challenges were a wide malarial river valley and difficult mountain ranges.

The main fighting in 1917 took place around Lake Doiran. In the first Battle of Dorian, the British attacked on 24th-25th April and gained a considerable amount of ground and resisted strong counter-attacks. William was reported missing on 29th April, but his death was not officially confirmed until mid-November. His record states his date of death to be 24th April. He was 23 years old. He is commemorated on the Dorian memorial as he has no known grave.

The official notification of his death reached Long Sutton at around the same time as the news of the death of W.F. Cox. The Sunday service in church took the form of a memorial to the two men and concluded with the singing of the National Anthem. The flag on the school was flown at half mast.

MEMORIAL SERVICE.—On Sunday morning the service at the parish church was of a memorial character, for the late Gunner W. F. Cox, and the late Corpl. W. Denning. Both were old scholars at the Church of England Day Schools, and the Union Jack was flown at half-mast on the school flagstaff. There was a good congregation and the service was a very impressive one. The vicar, the Rev. J. M. Skittery, officiated and preached a feeling sermon. The hymns sung were, "They whose course on earth is o'er," "Holy Father in Thy mercy," and "For all the Saints." After the blessing the organist, Mr. D. Needham, gave an impressive rendering of the Dead March in "Saul." At the conclusion the National Anthem was sung.