

PRIVATE WILLIAM JAMES BARNFIELD

8389, 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 25 on 29 October 1914

Buried with honour at *Tyne Cot Cemetery, Belgium*; LXI K 14

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey,
and at the Church of St. James the Great in Cranham



*Tyne Cot Cemetery,
Belgium*



Pte. W. J. Barnfield
[Graphic 3/4/1915]



*Gloucestershire
Regiment*

■ *Pte. Barnfield was the first local member of the Gloucestershire Regiment to be killed* ■

WILLIAM JAMES BARNFIELD was born in 1889, the eldest son of a Tirley family: his father James was originally a Severn boatman but, by 1901, he was assistant lock-keeper at the Upper Lode on the River Severn. In 1882 he had married Emma Niblett, having ten children but lost two as infants. William was a pupil of the Abbey Schools and accredited as a volunteer by the Headmaster in 1914. According to the 1911 Census, he was serving as a regular soldier with the 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment, based in Cambridge Barracks, Portsmouth.

William's army service number indicates that he enlisted in the Gloucestershire Regiment in 1906-1907. As a regular soldier he would have signed up for 12 years, probably seven with the Colours and five in the Army Reserve. As a reservist he was evidently recalled to the Colours on the outbreak of war and posted to the 1st Battalion, his original unit.

The Battalion was part of the 1st Division, an original unit of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and one of the first to move to France. The Battalion disembarked at Le Havre on 13 August 1914 and participated in the *Battle of Mons* (23 August) as well as the *Battles of the Marne* (7-10 September) and the *Aisne* (12-15 September). At the end of the month, the BEF moved north to Flanders to protect the Channel ports during the 'Race to the Sea'. The main encounter between the BEF and the German Army, the first *Battles of Ypres 1914*, started in

October. In the first phase, the *Battle of Langemarck* (21-24 October), the Battalion carried out an unsuccessful attack; the Germans counter-attacked, the battalion suffering 127 casualties and lost Langemarck – although the line held. The Germans then switched the attack, causing the loss of a further 167 men during the *Battle of Gheluvelt* (29-31 October).

Private William James Barnfield died in 1914 but the exact date of his death is uncertain. Although the casualty records state that he was 'killed in action', the *Graphic* published his photograph in March 1915, believing that he was a prisoner-of-war. It was only after the war in 1919 that his family learned that he had died whilst a prisoner and had been buried in the Military Cemetery at Kraiseik, Germany. The fact that William was transported to Germany before succumbing to his wounds on 29 October 1914 suggests that he may have gone missing during the *Battle of Langemarck*. His body was re-interred in *Tyne Cot Cemetery* in 1922; the inscription 'At Rest' was added to his headstone at his mother's request. William was awarded the '1914 (Mons) Star and Clasp'.

Private William Barnfield is commemorated in Tewkesbury and also on the memorial panel at the Church of St. James the Great in Cranham. His younger brother, Rufus Clement, a farm labourer, was conscripted into the Gloucestershire Regiment; he was not posted to France until after the Armistice.