

SERGEANT HARRY FIFIELD DIDCOTE

194, 17th Battalion, Australian Infantry, Australian Imperial Force

Died aged 29 on 12 January 1918

Buried with honour in *Gunners Farm Military Cemetery, Ypres*; O 9

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



Gunners Farm Military Cemetery



Australian Infantry, A.I.F

HARRY FIFIELD DIDCOTE was born at Apperley in 1888, son of Thomas, a waterman, and Mary (formerly Price). In 1901 he was living at 2 Jeynes Row with his mother, three brothers and a sister. He attended the Abbey Day and Sunday Schools and was a member of the Abbey Choir. On leaving school he was employed in turn by Dr. Elder, Mr. Handley, and the Gas Works, until he emigrated to Brisbane, Australia, sailing on *SS Pericles* (Aberdeen Line) on 15 January 1910. He was 22, classed as a 'labourer', and after arrival was employed as a 'land-worker' in Wetherill Park, Coonamble, New South Wales.

In February 1915 Harry enlisted as a Private in the 5th Infantry Brigade, 17th Infantry Battalion, 'A' Company, when his trade was listed as 'Tanner'. He embarked for England on *HMAT (His Majesty's Australian Transport) Themistocles*, leaving Sydney on 12 May 1915.

Like many Australians, he served at Gallipoli; he was reported missing in October 1915 but was later reported to be in hospital in Alexandria with a fractured jaw. The battalion arrived in France in March 1916 and was involved in the *Battle of Pozières* (23 July-7 August), part of the Somme campaign, in which the Australians suffered more casualties than in Gallipoli. In early 1917 the division was engaged in pushing the Germans back to the Hindenburg Line. Harry was mentioned in despatches on 3 March 1917 when it stated: *'He has consistently shown great devotion to duty under all circumstances. He has never left the Company since enlisting with the original Battalion. He has always set a good example to his platoon, both in and out of the line.'* 'Gazetted' on 1 June 1917, the battalion later took part in the *Third Battle of Ypres*, including the final phase, the *Second Battle of*

Passchendaele (26 October-10 November).

Sergeant Harry Fifield Didcote was killed near Ypres on 12 January 1918. His captain wrote: *'He was killed instantaneously by a shell which fell very close to him, and is buried in a little cemetery just behind the line. ... his fellow sergeants are getting a cross made ... much better and more lasting than the usual military one. ... I would like you to know that he was fearless and one of our most trusted N.C.O.s. ... I feel sure that he would have risen to commissioned rank ere this'*. The Chaplain added his *'deepest sympathy'*: *'Harry', as he was well-known by his comrades, was a general favourite among all ranks ... One of the soldiers who was with him a few minutes before he was killed heard Harry say to one of his mates who was singing a few lines of 'This is the end of a perfect day' "For God's sake, don't sing that, or something will happen to us". The next thing a shell burst in the trench, he was hit and all was over.'*

Mrs. Didcote also received a letter from a brother sergeant of the deceased: *'He was first at duty's call, having acquitted well and nobly on all occasions, and being of such a cheerful nature under the most trying circumstances ... Poor Harry was extremely well liked by all who knew him, and he was a general favourite in the sergeant's mess'*.

Harry is buried in *Gunners Farm Military Cemetery*, Ypres. Two of his brothers perished in 1915: **A.J. Didcote** [†] and **W.B. Didcote** [†], the younger brother who followed him to Australia. His father also died in 1915 aged 62.



**Mrs. Didcote, who had lost three sons
in the war, inaugurated the
Tewkesbury War Memorial in 1922**