

PRIVATE WILLIAM HENRY FITTON

243075, 7th Battalion, The Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment

Died aged 27 on 7 April 1918

Buried with honour in *Abbeville Communal Cemetery Extension*; III D 29

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



*Abbeville Communal Cemetery Extension,
Somme, France*



*The Queen's (Royal West Surrey)
Regiment*

WILLIAM HENRY FITTON was born in Tewkesbury in 1891, the son of Thomas Henry Fitton and Mary Hannah (formerly Hall) of 8 Cotteswold Place. Thomas was born in Pershore and Mary was from Pebworth, Gloucestershire. The houses in Cotteswold Place were built by Collins & Godfrey for the benefit of their skilled employees who rented them; father and son were joiners with the firm. William married Christian Roberts of Prussia Cove, Marazion, Cornwall, in late 1915 in Penzance, where he was possibly working on a Collins & Godfrey project. Christian, the daughter of a fisherman, was born in 1885 and in 1891 was living at Fisherman's Cottage, Helston Turnpike Road, Penzance. In 1911 she was a housemaid in charge of the 22-roomed Lanwithan House, Lostwithiel, Cornwall, with her employers absent. At the same time William was living in Tewkesbury with his father and his sister Jane.

William enlisted in autumn 1916, probably as a conscript, in Portsmouth where he was then living. His casualty record refers to initial service in the Essex Regiment although nothing is known of his time there. At some stage he was posted to the 7th Battalion, Queens (Royal West Surrey) Regiment. This battalion was originally formed at Guildford in September 1914, coming under the command of the 55th Infantry Brigade, 18th (Eastern) Division.

In March 1918 the 18th Division was part of the British Fifth Army who were holding the line

in the southern part of the Somme sector that had been targeted by the Germans as part of *Operation Michael* (from the British perspective known as the *First Battles of the Somme 1918*); this was the first phase of the campaign which became known as the German Spring Offensive or *Kaiserschlacht* (Kaiser's Battle). This lasted from 21 March to 18 July 1918 and was in effect the German Army's last throw of the dice. *Operation Michael* failed to achieve its strategic objectives and created the conditions which led to the defeat of the German Army later in the year. The 18th (Eastern) Division was involved in two of the battles which were part of the *Operation Michael* offensive: the *Battle of St. Quentin* (21-23 March 1918) and the *Battle of the Avre* (4-5 April 1918).

Private William Henry Fitton was undoubtedly wounded in one of these battles and died on 7 April in Abbeville on the River Somme, near the French coast. He would have been evacuated from the front line along a well-established chain of medical units until he reached one of the Stationary Hospitals based in Abbeville. Unfortunately, William did not recover from his wounds and he is buried in the adjoining *Abbeville Communal Cemetery Extension*.

His widow, Christian, did not remarry and died in 1940, leaving £521 in her will. She had been living with her husband's parents, and was buried next to them.