

PRIVATE WILLIAM THOMAS HAWKER

240214, 1st/5th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 23 on 16 August 1917

Remembered with honour at *Tyne Cot Memorial, Zonnebeke, Ypres*; Panel 72 to 75
Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross, in the Abbey and in the Methodist Church



*Tyne Cot Memorial,
Zonnebeke, Ypres*



L/Cpl. William Hawker
[Graphic 22/9/1917]



*Gloucestershire
Regiment*

WILLIAM THOMAS HAWKER was born in the Gloucester district in early 1894, the son of William Hawker of Eldersfield and Blanche (formerly Hiam) from Hartpury. His obituary reported that he was adopted, aged 3, by his aunt Harriet (formerly Hawker) who had married George Healey, a Bricklayers Labourer in 1876, but they had no children. The decision may have been influenced by the health of Blanche, who died in Gloucester in 1899 at the age of 39. In 1901 the Healeys were living in Gravel Walk but neither William nor his father was living with them at the time. William had been a pupil in the Council School, Chance Street, and subsequently worked for T. B. Milner, Ironmonger, 9 High Street (in 2014 the 'Nodding Gables' of Halifax Building Society). In 1911 he was living with his uncle and aunt at 30 Gravel Walk as a 17-year-old General Labourer. His father remarried in 1901 but his uncle died aged 60 in 1916.

Based on his regimental number, William originally enlisted in Gloucester around February 1913 in the 5th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment, one of its pre-war Territorial units. It was mobilised in August 1914 and William appears to have joined the 2nd/5th Battalion, formed in September 1914 as a home service (second-line) unit. The fact that he was not awarded the '1914-15 Star' medal suggests that he did not go abroad until 23 May 1916 with this second-line reserve battalion – just in time for the battles of the Somme. It was reported that he had been wounded in the foot whilst the battalion was fighting there in August 1916. He then moved to the 1st/5th Battalion, possibly after recovery as this was why soldiers often changed units.

After May 1915 this first-line Territorial battalion had been allocated to the 145th Brigade, 48th (South Midland) Division. By August 1917 the battalion had moved over to Ypres for the *Battle of Passchendaele*, during which it took part in the *Battle for Pilckem Ridge* when 18 square miles of land was captured. William's death coincides with the *Battle for Langemarck*, during which both sides attacked and counter-attacked, with each side's artillery dominant.

Private William Thomas Hawker died on 16 August 1917. Fellow Territorial Sgt. J. Parsons recalled that he was known as 'Shiner', and his death was also lamented by the son of his employer, Mr. Milner: *'He was known to me for a number of years, during which time he was in my father's employ. I must say he was very much respected by all our family, and all his fellow mates. Both Will and myself were often together, both in and out of working hours.'*

Private William Hawker's body was not recovered or identified after the war and his name only is commemorated on the Memorial to the Missing in *Tyne Cot Cemetery* near Ypres. He had been killed a few days after **CSM C. H. Attwood** [†] of the 1st/5th Battalion and at the same time as **Pte. F. W. Hawker** [† but no relation] and **Pte. R. N. Coleman** [†].

William was a member of the Wesleyan Methodist Church and his death is now commemorated there. Sunday School leader, Jesse Price, recalled that *'he grew up from the infant school to be one of our most earnest workers [a Sunday School teacher] ... Our old scholar, Willie Hawker, [has been] taken to a 'better country'.*