

PRIVATE WILLIAM GEORGE KEYLOCK

6169, 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 31 on 15 November 1914

Buried with honour at *Boulogne Eastern Cemetery, France*; III C33

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross, in the Abbey and on the County Memorial



*Boulogne Eastern Cemetery,
France*



Pte. William G. Keylock
[Graphic 5/12/1914]



*Gloucestershire
Regiment*

WILLIAM GEORGE KEYLOCK was born in Tewkesbury in 1883 to John Keylock, a shepherd, and his wife Fanny, both from Birmingham. The family, including six children by 1891, lived at various times in Spring Gardens and St. Mary's Lane. In 1888 the family was poor enough for Fanny and Clara, the eldest child, to be convicted of stealing swedes at Twynning. Fanny died in 1892 and John in 1896, both aged only 43. By 1901 the two youngest children, Ernest Frank and Alfred James, were living in 'Mullers Orphan House', an orphanage in Bristol which housed over 1,300 children. William was educated at the Abbey School but sought the traditional solution to the problem of poverty by joining the army. In early 1901, at the age of 18, he enlisted in the Gloucestershire Regiment and served with the 1st Battalion in the **Boer War**. William's older brother, Leonard, had also joined the 3rd Battalion, a Militia unit, in January 1898 as a part-time soldier, but he died shortly afterwards aged 17. In 1910, whilst still a soldier, William took part in the parade to mark the death of King Edward VII. William has not been located on the 1911 Census.

As a Reservist William was recalled to the Colours soon after the outbreak of war and posted back to the 1st Battalion; it was part of the 1st Division, one of the original units 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 moved to Belgium where it was involved in the *Battle of Mons* and subsequent retreat. William arrived in France on 31 August 1914 to join his battalion, probably with reinforcements who reached the battalion on 5 September, just before

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 vital Channel ports and to take part in an Allied attempt to outflank the Germans (the 'Race to the Sea'). The final phase of the [First] *Battles of Ypres 1914* was the *Battle of Nonne Bosschen* (11 November) when the Germans made a final, but unsuccessful, attempt to break through the British defences. The Battalion War Diary for that day observed that it '*supported a counter attack against the Prussian Guards*'. The *Register* reported that Private Keylock '*had extricated Private S. Hanson from being buried under earth and was wounded soon afterwards*'.

Private William George Keylock died on 15 November 1914 from wounds sustained during that action. He had been evacuated to a hospital in Boulogne, one of the three main base ports, and was buried there in *Eastern Cemetery* where, unusually, the headstones are laid flat due to the sandy soil. He was awarded the '*1914 (Mons) Star and Clasp*'.

When they left the orphanage in Bristol, William's younger brothers appear to have settled in Wales. Both served in the war: Ernest in the Royal Engineers and survived but Alfred, in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, died in Salonika in September 1918 of pneumonia and malaria. Despite the dispersal of the children after the death of their parents, they seem to have made some effort to stay in touch: Ernest nominated William as his next-of-kin on attestation in May 1915 (unaware that William had already died) and Clara, William's eldest sister, of 116 New John Street, Birmingham, was his next-of-kin and also that of Alfred on his attestation.