

PRIVATE HARRY JAMES CRIPPS PRESTON

G/971, 2nd Battalion, The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment)

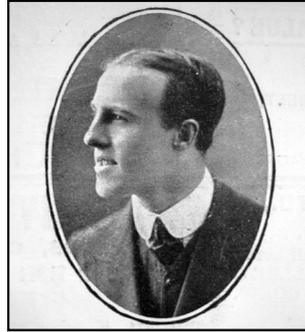
Died aged 26 on 16 May 1915

Remembered with honour on *Le Touret Memorial*; Panel 4 and 5

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



*Le Touret Memorial,
France*



*Pte. H.J. Preston
[Graphic 12/6/1915]*



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

HARRY JAMES CRIPPS PRESTON was born in 1889 in Bourton-on-the-Water, the third son of James George Preston, a master tailor, and Martha Elizabeth (formerly Cripps). James was born in Burford in 1849 and Martha came from Fullbrook, Oxfordshire. They moved to Tewkesbury in 1894 when James became the licensee of the Wheatsheaf Inn. He maintained his tailoring interests, renting a lockup 'Market Shop' in Sun Street/Station Street, and at least three of his sons followed his trade. Harry was confirmed at the Abbey in 1902, attended the Abbey School and was in the Choir. On leaving school he was apprenticed to his father, and took an interest in the Band of Hope (Temperance). He was also a member of the 2nd Volunteer Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment. After his apprenticeship, he left Tewkesbury to take up a 'good situation' in Croydon. In 1911 Harry was living as a boarder with a family in Bexhill-on-Sea, Sussex, working as a 'Tailor Habit Finisher'.

Soon after the outbreak of war, Harry enlisted in Croydon in the Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment). In his obituary, the *Register* claims that 'he shortly afterwards went to France and, in a few days after his arrival, he volunteered to join a draft for the firing line where during the past six months he was in some of the hardest fighting in the war'. This probably refers to the time when Harry was posted to the 2nd Battalion of the regiment, which had returned on 19 September from South Africa; although it was a regular battalion, Harry had enlisted for wartime service only. On returning to England the battalion joined the 7th Division before being sent to Zeebrugge on 6 October 1914. 'They were initially moved to Belgium to assist in the

defence of Antwerp. However, by the time they arrived the city was already falling. Once the Belgians were through, the battalion was moved westwards, where they entrenched in front of Ypres, the first British troops to occupy that fateful place. The Division fought the advancing German army to a standstill at Ypres. All units suffered grievous losses, and it was often known as the 'Immortal Seventh'.'

Harry did not join the battalion in time for the *First Battle of Ypres 1914*; he arrived on 11 December 1914, shortly before the Christmas Truce, when British and German soldiers fraternised on Christmas Day 1914.

Following pressure from the French, the British launched offensives in May 1915 as part of the *Second Battle of Artois*, to attract German reinforcements to the British front rather than the French positions near Arras. The *Battle of Festubert* (15-27 May 1915) was the second phase, a continuation of the earlier unsuccessful *Battle of Aubers Ridge* (9 May). On 16 May the 2nd Battalion went over the top in an attack at Festubert and was involved in heavy fighting throughout the day. The War Diary noted that 'the battalion had done what was asked of it but at great cost', and casualties totalled 435.

Private Harry Preston was killed in action on 16 May 1915. The *Register* commented that: 'Private Preston was one of the noble band of heroes, and Tewkesbury should be proud that one of its sons fought with such a distinguished regiment, and, at last, laid down his gallant young life in the service of his King and Country.' His body was not recovered and he is commemorated on the *Le Touret Memorial*. He was awarded the '1914-15 Star' medal.