

PRIVATE HAROLD ERNEST ROWLEY

13793, 8th (Service) Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 24 on 3 July 1916

Remembered with honour on *Thiepval Memorial*; Pier and Face 5A and 5B

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



Thiepval Memorial, France



1914-15 Star Medal



Gloucestershire Regiment

HAROLD ERNEST ROWLEY was born in Tewkesbury in 1892, the middle son of George Rowley and Rachel Jane (formerly Smith). Originally from Highnam, Leicestershire, George ran a bakery from the family home at 6 Church Street. Rachel was born in Tewkesbury, where they married in 1880. They had six children: one died in infancy; Harold and Herbert George were killed in the war; and Arthur died in 1921, possibly as a result of his military service. George died in 1909 and, after her husband's death, Jane kept a shop at 88 High Street (now the shopping centre); the family home in 1911 was at Malvern View, Mill Road. Harold was educated at the Abbey Schools and in 1911 he was living with his mother, working as a butcher's assistant. Later, he became a post office messenger, followed by working for the London Meat Company at the Cross. He was also a member of the YMCA.

Harold volunteered at the famous recruiting rally at the Watson Hall in September 1914: he was *'one of the first to mount the platform to enlist'*. He appears to have enlisted in the Gloucestershire Regiment at the same time as Leonard Rossell whose army service number succeeded Harold's by two. The two recruits were killed in the same action and on the same day. Harold's surviving military records link him to the 8th (Service) Battalion which was formed at Bristol in September 1914 as part of Kitchener's Army in the 19th (Western) Division. It landed in France on 18 July 1915 whereas Harold's medal records indicate that he arrived in France three months earlier on 18 April 1915, suggesting that he may have been posted originally to another battalion.

The first campaign in which the 8th (Service) Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment, took part was the joint Anglo-French Somme offensive, later known collectively as the *Battles of the Somme 1916* (1 July-18 November). The battalion was not involved in the disastrous first day but was one of the units in the Division which assaulted the village of La Boisselle on 3 July as part of the wider *Battle of Albert* (1-13 July 1916), the first phase of the Somme offensive. The War Diary reported that: *'Attacked La Boisselle and consolidated position – remained there all day and night'*. The capture of the village was completed the following day, the Diary commenting: *'5pm – Moved up to La Boisselle, occupying dug outs in village'*. The Diary reported total casualties of 302 killed, wounded and missing.

Private Harold Ernest Rowley was killed in action on 3 July 1916, the same day as **Private Leonard Rossell** [†], during the assault on La Boisselle. His body was never recovered and he is commemorated on the *Thiepval Memorial* to the Missing of the Somme. Harold was awarded the *'1914-1915 Star'* medal.

Harold's eldest brother, **Private Herbert G. Rowley** [†] of the 7th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment, was killed in Mesopotamia (Iraq) in 1917; his younger brother, **Private Arthur H. Rowley** [†], the Durham Light Infantry, died in 1921 as a consequence of his military service during which he was wounded and gassed. The Rowley family lost three sons, as did Mrs. Letitia Didcote, who was accorded the honour of inaugurating the War Memorial in May 1922. All the Rowley family seem to have left the town by 1939.