

PRIVATE WILLIAM HENRY SHELDON

14516, 11th Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment

Died aged 29 on 11 August 1916

Remembered with honour at *Thiepval Memorial*; Pier & Face 9A 9B 9C

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



Thiepval Memorial, France



Royal Warwickshire Regiment

WILLIAM HENRY SHELDON was born in Tewkesbury in 1887 to William Sheldon and Kate (formerly Nevitt). William was born in Tewkesbury and Kate came from Birmingham. In 1891 the family was living in Birmingham, with William a labourer, but in 1901 he was recorded in two places: as a boatman working on a canal-boat moored at Worcester Wharf in Birmingham, with two of his sons, William Henry and Joseph; simultaneously as a bargeman living at the family home in Oldbury Road, Tewkesbury. By 1909 William Henry had moved to Birmingham where he married Agnes Maud Sands. In 1911 the couple were living in Sherborne Street, Ladywood, with members of Agnes's family and William Henry was a bargeman for a coal merchant. At the same time his parents and siblings were still living in Tewkesbury in Double Alley and William's occupation was described as a hay trusser.

William Henry enlisted in Birmingham on 31 July 1915 in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and joined the 11th (Service) Battalion, formed at Warwick in September 1914 as part of Kitchener's Army. The battalion landed originally in France on 30 July 1915 and joined the 37th Division. According to William's medal records he did not qualify for the '1914-15 Star', from which it can be assumed that he was not posted to France until 1916. The Division was in reserve at the start of the *Battles of the Somme 1916* and did not see action until November. However, his brigade was detached and transferred to the 34th Division for six weeks to replace a brigade that had been withdrawn, the 34th Division sustaining the highest number of casualties of any British division on 1 July.

During that time the battalion was involved in the latter part of the *Battle of Bazentin*, when 275 men were killed, wounded or missing on 15 July in an unsuccessful attempt to occupy the key village of Pozières. Soon afterwards the battalion took part in the battle when the Australian Corps attempted, and eventually succeeded, albeit at a high cost, in capturing and holding Pozières. On 11 August the battalion was holding the front line and its War Diary noted: '*Hostile artillery very intense throughout the day ... guns searching our support trenches mostly ... A large number of men were buried by HE shells, this accounts for the missing ... 4 bodies were dug out afterwards and pieces of other men, unrecognisable ... This was a very trying day for the troops.*' The diary records casualties of 63 men killed, wounded and missing for that day.

Private William Henry Sheldon was killed in action on 11 August 1916 but the *Register* did not announce his death until 3 March 1917. His body was never recovered and he is commemorated instead on the *Thiepval Memorial*; his name is also on the Roll of Honour in the Hall of Memory in Centenary Square, Birmingham.

His father, William, had also volunteered on 28 July 1915 aged 44, serving in two of its Reserve Battalions before finally transferring to the Labour Corps in 1917 without having served overseas, because of his age; there was a report that he had been injured accidentally after being kicked by a horse. William Henry's brother, Edward, also volunteered in August 1914 into the 1st Gloucesters; he was badly wounded in the right shoulder on the Somme in August 1916 but was eventually discharged on 8 October 1917 because of his wounds.