

PRIVATE BASIL ERNEST WILLIAMS

7045, 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 43 on 2 March 1924

Buried without CWGC recognition in *Tewkesbury Cemetery*; C-631

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross



Area of unmarked graves, including B. Williams C-631 *1914 (Mons) Star Medal* *Gloucestershire Regiment*

BASIL ERNEST WILLIAMS was born in Tewkesbury in 1880, the eldest son of John Williams (then an Ostler) and Dorothy Harriett (formerly Venn) from Norwich. She was a Laundress in 1891 and died in 1893, aged 34. A former pupil of the Abbey School, Basil was a Labourer in 1911 living in Laights Court, Church Street, and in that year married Amy Curtis of Parkers Court. A daughter and son were born before the war but the latter died aged 18 months in 1916 when the family was living in Smith's Court. A further two children were born during the war.

Basil joined the 1st Glosters at Bristol in 1904, signing up for three years in the Colours and nine years on Reserve. Before that, he served for just 46 days in the 3rd (Militia) Battalion. After three years' service, he was transferred to the 1st Class Reserve on 18 January 1907.

As a Reservist, Basil was mobilised on 5 August 1914. His records show that he returned to the 1st Battalion, part of the original British Expeditionary Force and part of the 1st Division. He landed at Le Havre on 13 August 1914, but by 12 September the *Tewkesbury Register* reported that he had been wounded at the *Battle of Mons*, the first action involving British forces. His letter home, written whilst in hospital, said that on 29 August he had '*badly sprained his ankle*', so seriously that after three days he was shipped home to Netley Hospital, Southampton. He wrote that '*it is nothing very serious. We have had a rough time of it. I am invalided. We have been over the Belgian frontier and in three battles I have not had my clothes off since I left England*'. The newspaper reported his being sent back to the front as '*now fit*', but this is questionable as his service record shows that after 24 days he returned to England on 5 September

1914 and remained in the UK for a year. His initial overseas service entitled him to receive the '*1914 (Mons) Star*' medal and to be known as an '*Old Contemptible*'. [His Medal Index lists no Campaign Medals – surely an error.]

On 27 October 1915 Basil returned to France; his battalion had suffered heavy losses at the *Battle of Loos* in September. He returned from France on 15 February 1916 but the next day was assigned to the 7th Battalion, a 'Kitchener Army' unit raised in Bristol in August 1914, and was posted to Mesopotamia where the battalion was involved in several battles during 1916. Basil was repatriated on 4 January 1917 and in April was granted nine days leave, seemingly after time in hospital, perhaps the effects of his Middle Eastern service. His pass included a comment that he was '*Fit for service at home, but unlikely to be fit for Service Overseas*'. He qualified as a 'Lewis [Machine] Gunner' and as a 'Bomber' in July but did not serve overseas again. He was finally demobilised in March 1919 having completed more than 16 years' service, including the time spent in the Army Reserve.

Basil Ernest Williams died on 2 March 1924 in Wright's Court, Barton Street, a few days after his father's death, and is buried in *Tewkesbury Cemetery* in an unmarked grave. His death certificate cited '*pulmonary tuberculosis*' as cause of death. It was too late for him to be accorded a military funeral and to be added to the *Abbey Memorial to the Fallen*, but his name is included on the Memorial at the Cross. His widow remarried to John Booth in 1925 and had two more children, but moved away from Tewkesbury.

Basil's brother, **Corporal Reginald G. Williams** [†] of the South Wales Borderers, was killed in action on 17 July 1917.