

PARKER, William – killed in action – 25 September 1915 – aged 19

William George Parker was born in Beaminster on 4 October 1896. He was the eldest son of George Parker (b 1865 in Bridport) and Matilda Parker (born 1867).

In 1901 he was 4 and lived on Castle Hill, Axminster with his father, who was a railway carter and mother and siblings Florence (12), Emma (7), Ethel (6), and Beatrice (2).

In 1911 he was 14 and lived with his parents at Green Down, Membury, with siblings Florence, Beatrice, Maud, Eva, Frederick (3), Lilian (2) and Henry (1). His father George was 46 and working as a labourer.

William Parker volunteered in August 1914 in Axminster and joined the 8th Battalion, Devonshire Regiment. He volunteered along with Noah Aplin, Roland and William Salway as they have consecutive army numbers. He spent a year at Aldershot training camp. Then, with his comrades, he embarked for France, landing at Le Havre, at the end of July 1915 and 2 months later was to face his first battle. It was to be his last.

The Devonshires formed part of forces that were massed to try and break through the German lines, under General Haig at Loos-en-Goselle, in Northern France.

The attack started on 25 September 1915. For 3 days they had listened to the French and British bombardment as they moved up to the front. What they didn't know, was that there was a shortage of artillery ammunition to do the job. They were to find out later.

Before the 6.30 off, the 8th Battalion were waiting to 'go over the top'. The men were told to wear their gas masks. It was the first time masks had been used. They were very rudimentary, and the men couldn't see through fogged-up eyepieces, and could barely breathe with them on. Many soldiers took them off.

That morning, tons of chlorine gas was released for the first time by the British. In places it blew back on to their own lines. Many men were quickly engulfed in gas – eyes streaming and choking.

The whistle blew. Over the top and advancing over open fields, they were within range of German machine guns and artillery that had not been taken out by the bombardment. British losses were devastating, although by the end of the day they managed to break through and capture the town of Loos-en-Gohelle. The attack went on for another 3 days.

Thousands were killed. Amongst them, two Membury lads were killed that first day – 25th September 1915. One of them was William Parker (aged 19). He has no grave and is commemorated on the Loos Memorial to the Missing along with over 20,600 servicemen missing in action with no known grave..

His father, George, also served in the war.

In 1915 George and Matilda Parker were living in Venn Cottage, Whitchurch, Bridport