

## **Private Harold Chester**

**Died 28<sup>th</sup> April 1918 aged 18**

Harold Chester was born in 1899 in Lancashire. His father, Robert, was a Shropshire man, having been born at Newcastle on Clun, but his mother, Margaret, was from Wigan and all seven of their children were born in Lancashire.

Robert was a Commercial traveller in the paper trade and the family lived first at 101 Northumberland Road, Old Trafford before moving to Claremont Road Moss Side.

Some time between 1911 and 1914 Harold moved with his family to The Villa, Enchmarsh, which is a hamlet just outside Cardington. Here Harold worked as a bicycle repairer.

Harold had a twin brother, Arthur. On 4<sup>th</sup> September 1916, aged 17 years and 8 months, Harold and Arthur went into Church Stretton and enlisted. It is likely that they attested under the "Group Scheme" (otherwise known as the "Derby Scheme") designed by Lord Derby to increase voluntary recruitment and extended in September 1916 to those born in 1899, with an assurance they would not be called into service until they were 18.

Harold joined the Alexandra, Princess of Wales Own (Yorkshire Regiment) 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The two brothers were assigned consecutive service numbers, 63494 and 63495. Harold was only a small man, 5ft 3  $\frac{3}{4}$  in height and weighing 110lb, but was declared to be in good health.

It was not until October 1917 that he was mobilized spending time at Prees Heath Camp near Whitchuch. He was then transferred to the 64<sup>th</sup> Training Battalion which was one of the reserve infantry battalions of the regular and new armies where recruits were sent for basic training. Harold's battalion was based at a camp at Kimnel Hall near Abergele. (Training trenches can still be seen nearby in the grounds of Bodelwyddon Castle).

On 16<sup>th</sup> February 1918 Harold was posted to the 51<sup>st</sup> Battalion Welch Regiment and on 7<sup>th</sup> April he was sent to France.

Harold set sail from Southampton on 5th April, arriving at La Havre the following day where he was posted to 13<sup>th</sup> BM Welch Regiment. He only remained with that regiment for a week.

On 18<sup>th</sup> April he was posted to the 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Divisional Pioneers. This battalion was engaged in the Second Battle of the Somme, part of The Spring Offensive. But by 28<sup>th</sup> April Harold was declared dead in the field, of lobar pneumonia.

Harold was buried at Bagneux British Cemetery at Gezaincourt. This is a smaller cemetery of 1372 casualties, started in April 1918 after the close of the German offensive in Picardy. In May and June casualties from the Canadian Stationary Hospital were also buried there. The monuments were designed by Sir Edward Lutyens.



To make matters even worse for his parents, they received a telegram reporting that he was dangerously ill, followed four days later by one reporting his death, but both telegrams referred to his twin Arthur, and it was left to his mother to tell the War Office that they had the wrong son.

In fact Arthur was gassed but did survive the war, as did the two older brothers, Robert and George although in 1920 George was in hospital in Canada. The family continued to live in Enchmarsh.

Harold is commemorated both on the Church Stretton War Memorial (wrongly recorded there as "Chesters") and on the Leebotwood Memorial which is in the Churchyard.