

Harold Godwin Williamson
1896-1916, aged at death 20
Student at the Society of the Sacred Mission

Family History

Harold was born in 1896 in New Romney, Romney Marsh, Kent and was baptised on 13 March that year. His father, Arthur William, and mother, Kate, were school master and school mistress working at the National School in New Romney.

Harold had an older brother (Cyril) and sister (Annie) and one younger sister (Pattie).

From the Michaelmas Term of 1910 to the Lent Term of 1914 Harold was pupil at St Edward's School, Woodstock Road, Oxford. He father was born in Oxford, so it is likely that there was a family connection.

He joined the Society on 1 June 1914 but was there only a short time as he enlisted in the Queen Victoria Rifles (The Green Jackets) in September 1914. He is reported to have been a splendid cricketer and a good all-round character.



Photographs courtesy of St Edward's School, Oxford.
Harold as a schoolboy and as a member of the 1913
cricket team.



The School had been founded in 1873 by Rev'd Algernon Barrington Simeon and its early intentions were to educate the sons of middle class clergy and to emphasise the teachings of the Anglican faith. It is not surprising then that Harold decided to follow such a devout path as a career, the school was a very religious one at the time, deeply embedded in the High Anglican Church with the founders all being members of the neo-Catholic 'Oxford Movement'.

Military History

At the outbreak of war he enlisted in the Queen Victoria Rifles (The Green Jackets) as a private and suffered a very cold winter in the trenches in France. He was then commissioned in 1915 with the North Staffordshire Regiment. During his officer training Harold attended All Saints', Margaret Street, London; a church noted for its Anglo-Catholic worship. The Vicar described him as

brimming over with spirits and fun; his face was made for laughter; he was full of physical courage. He had his clothes torn to bits by shrapnel when he was a private, but he hated his life here in an officers' training corps.

Harold is reported to have said that he did not mind being killed but had a great fear of being maimed for life as this would have prevented him becoming a priest. He had asked everyone to pray that he would be killed outright, rather than be wounded.

He was killed in action on 1st July 1916. His body was never found. He is commemorated at Thiepval memorial, Somme, Pier and Face, 14B and 14C. His death was marked at All Saints' by a solemn requiem Mass attended not just by relatives but also by the Duke of Newcastle, Lady Mildred Allsopp, Sir Edgar Sebright, the Hon. Mary Trefusis and other notables.

A solemn requiem for 2nd-Lieut. Harold Godwin Williamson, of the North Staffordshire Regiment, and 2nd-Lieut. Harold Linklater Colville, of the Somerset Light Infantry, who fell in the recent fighting in France, was sung at All Saints', Margaret-street, London, on Tuesday. In addition to relatives, there were present in the large congregation the Duke of Newcastle, Lady Mildred Allsopp, Sir Edgar Sebright, the Hon. Mary Trefusis, Mr. Ian Malcolm, M.P., and Mr. D. Malcolm Scott.

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SOURCES:

FindMyPast <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/>

Nottinghamshire Great War Roll of Honour: <http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/rollofhonour/>

Commonwealth War Graves Commission: <https://www.cwgc.org/>

Forces War Records website: <https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk/>

Society of the Sacred Mission Quarterly Newsletter, Borthwick Institute: <https://www.york.ac.uk/borthwick/>