



HARRY JOHN SHRIMPTON died 30 August 1916

Harry John Shrimpton was one of four sons of Joshua and Mary Shrimpton living at East Street, Thame. He was born in 1882, but it was not until July 1909 that he was baptised in Lewknor, at the age of 27. This was probably in preparation for his marriage to Gladys Gwendoline Smith a few weeks later on 2nd August. They moved to 66 Park Street, Thame where they had three children, Constance Gwendoline, Douglas Henry and Edward.

As a former member of the local territorial Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars, retiring with the rank of Corporal, when the National Reserve was started in Thame, he became one of its first members and volunteered for general service.

At the outbreak of the war, he went with several other Thame reservists and enlisted in the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry, initially posted to the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion. On 7th July 1915 Harry, having recently been promoted to Corporal, entrained for the Front to join the 5th Battalion, part of the 14th Division, 42nd Brigade, who were operating in trenches near the Hooge in Belgium.

In the autumn of 1915, it was reported that as a result of the Battalion's action at Bellewaarde Farm on 26th September, he was recommended for the Distinguished Conduct Medal, and received congratulations from Major-General V Couper, Commander of the 14th Division, on "*his gallant and meritorious conduct.*" No record has been found that this was formally ratified and awarded. It was this action that probably also contributed to Harry's promotion to Sergeant in October 1915.



Over the next few months the Battalion carried out various duties in trenches in northern France, interspersed with spells of rest and training, before moving down to the Somme in August 1916, where, on the 24th, they formed part of the attack on Delville Wood. Harry was one of the many casualties, receiving a gunshot wound to the chest. He was evacuated to hospital at Rouen where he died of his wound on 30th August 1916. He was 34 years old.

8862 Sergeant Harry John Shrimpton, Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry, is buried in St Sever Cemetery, Rouen. He is remembered in Thame on the War Memorial and on the Memorial Boards of St Mary's Church, All Saints' Church and Christchurch.

*The Thame Remembers Cross was placed at his grave on 30th August 2016
by Thame residents, Nick and Hilly Carter.*



Just over 100 years ago, Harry Shrimpton left our house in Park Street and boarded a troop ship for France. Having served with distinction for 15 months, he died of his wounds on 30th August 1916 after ferocious fighting at the Battle for Delville Wood. A century later, my wife Hilly and I left the same house and boarded the Dieppe ferry. And on the exact centenary of Harry's death, we were able to honour his memory in a simple ceremony at his grave in Rouen.

We are the current custodians of the Victorian terraced cottage in Thame where Harry, his wife Gladys and three young children lived before the Great War began. Nowadays, as we carry out our daily routines, it's easy to imagine our predecessors grouped around the fireplace or passing upon the stairs, or to glimpse a fleeting shadow through a doorway. And we can picture the scene as Harry gives his wife Gladys a farewell hug on the doorstep in Park Street, before he entrains with the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry. Would he have had a last couple of pints on the previous evening at the Wenman Arms next door, or the Four Horseshoes opposite the house? Neither of these names exist now, but they would have been his local pubs back in the day.

It became important for Hilly and me to say our personal thanks to Harry for his selfless heroism and ultimate sacrifice. We made the commemorative trip accompanied by our dear friend Mike Dyer, one of the organizers of the unique Thame Remembers Project. This nationally recognized project is Mike's passion and he did a lot of research before our trip. He talked us through the Battle of Bellewaarde Farm, near Ypres, where Harry had been recommended for a medal. And in the manner of a war historian, Mike gave us a detailed account of the bloody struggle to take over Delville Wood, in which Harry, newly promoted to Sergeant, had been mortally wounded at the age of 34.

Despite the company of such an experienced visitor to France's war cemeteries, nothing really prepares the novice for the sight of 12,000 white headstones standing shoulder to shoulder as if in the serried ranks of a parade ground. Hilly and I stood open-mouthed as we took in the scene and contemplated our route through Rouen's beautiful St Sever cemetery to Harry's grave. In lovely late August weather, we were able to carry out our promise to the house where Harry and his family had once been happy. On the exact 100th anniversary of his death, we placed the Thame Remembers Cross in front of Harry's headstone, recited the 'Ode of Remembrance' in tribute and joined hands in heartfelt prayer. Thank you, Harry: for as long as our house stands and Thame exists, you will indeed be remembered.

Nick Carter

Nick's story of the delivery of a Thame Remembers Cross