

Stories of the Great War

Harry Victor Young 1890 - 1916

*“My dearest Jennie,
It is with deepest sympathy from us all that I am writing in answer to Eva’s card of last night with the sad news of poor Harry’s death. She said you had not heard officially, but if this news came from a Hampton man who knew him, I am afraid it is only too true.”*

This extract, from a letter written on Saturday 15th July 1916, sums up the difficulties in receiving information on the fate of relatives during the Battle of the Somme. Many men who joined up together tried to ensure that news was sent home and in this case it seems probable that one of the Hampton recruits to Kitchener’s Army, photographed in 1914 in the High Street, had sent back the sad tidings. Harry joined the 8th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment and by July 1916 had already served for almost a year on the Western Front. His obituary states *“he was closely identified with the life of the Parish – a communicant, a member of the choir from boyhood days and of late years the caretaker of the Church Club”*



Harry was the youngest surviving son of Edwin Young, a blacksmith, of Park Terrace. He and his wife Jane (nee Blick) had eleven children, but only six survived childhood. Eva was the sister nearest to him in age, and was a servant with the Beale family. By 1911 Harry (21) was living with his mother at Windmill Lodge, working as a gardener; his cousin Clara, an uncertificated teacher from London, was also living there. (It was her mother who wrote the letter from Chiswick quoted above). His other surviving brother, Frank, had emigrated, moving to Canada, but enlisted with the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force in 1915 and served as a medical orderly in the Middle East.

Harry Young died on 3rd July 1916 in the successful attack and capture of La Boisselle. Moving along the trenches 8th Battalion went “over the top” at 3.15 a.m. and remained in control all day and the following night, before holding the support line – named Ryecroft Street after a road in Gloucester. The objective was gained although casualties were high.

The action at La Boisselle was characterised by the bravery of the troops and Adrian Carton de Wiart, the acting C.O. of 8th Battalion, was awarded the Victoria Cross *“For most conspicuous bravery, coolness and determination during severe operations of a prolonged nature. It was owing in a great measure to his dauntless courage and inspiring example that a serious reverse was averted. He displayed the utmost energy and courage in forcing our attack home. After three other battalion Commanders had become casualties, he controlled their commands, and ensured that the ground won was maintained at all costs. He frequently exposed himself in the organisation of positions and of supplies, passing unflinchingly through fire barrage of the most intense nature. His gallantry was inspiring to all.”* Shortly after Colonel Carton de Wiart received his Victoria Cross he told a friend that it had been won by the 8th Gloucesters, *“for every man in the battalion has done as much as I have.”*

Postscript: The letter above, together with postcards relating to Frank Young and other World War I documents, were saved from destruction by Jeff Dyer, who generously lent them for copying by Minchinhampton Local History Group.