

Private PS 1614 William John Button

16th (Public Schools) Battalion, Middlesex Regiment (Duke of Cambridge's Own)

Born 1895 St Mabyn

Killed in Action 1st July 1916 aged 21

William was the youngest of four sons born to Henry John Hooper Button and Susan Ann (Annie) Kellow. She was born in Lostwithiel in 1856. Her husband, a grocer, draper and general dealer in St. Mabyn in the 1880s-90s, was born in 1856 in Blisland and died when William was 9-months old. The family, Thomas Henry (born 1883), Stafford (1888), Fred (1890) and William moved to St. Tudy. Only five years after owning their own business, Annie was a charwoman in St. Tudy where she lived until her death in 1926, aged 71.

By 1911, William's brother Thomas Henry was married and living in St. Mabyn with his wife Maud and their son, Henry John Button who was almost two. Thomas had his own business as a market gardener and lived on the premises at Pentire Glaze, St. Minver. Stafford married Jessie a year earlier. He was a chauffeur in Park Lane, Lower Froyle Alton, Hampshire. There is no information on Fred to date. Stafford joined the Army Service Corps and survived the war. It is assumed Fred and Thomas Henry were in WW1, possibly the Navy, and survived.

William, a footman, joined the 16th (Reserve) Battalion, (Public Schools) Middlesex Regiment on the 22nd February 1915 in Woldingham, Surrey. He was a long way from home. William's war records, have luckily survived. His enlistment papers note that he was a single man, 5ft 6ins tall with "some curious teeth" as a distinguishing mark or "slight defect". The 16th Battalion moved to Warlingham, Surrey, then Clipstone, Nottinghamshire, and joined the 100th Brigade of the 33rd Division. In August 1915 it moved to Perham Down, Salisbury Plain and, in the same month, the War Office took command of the Battalion.

On the 17th November 1915 they were mobilised for war, landing at Boulogne and transferring to GHQ Troops a week later. On 25th April 1916 they transferred to 86th Brigade 29th Division, fighting in various actions on the Western Front in 1916. William was reported as Missing in Action on 1st July 1916, the first day of the Battle of Albert and confirmed Killed in Action on 27th July. The Allies preparatory artillery bombardment began on 24th June 1916, and the Anglo-French infantry attacked on the 1st July, on the south bank from Fourcaucourt to the Somme and from the Somme north to Gommecourt, 2 miles beyond Serre. The French Sixth Army and the right wing of the British Fourth Army inflicted a considerable defeat on the German Second Army. However the British attack was a disaster from Albert-Bapaume road to Comsecourt, incurring most of the 58,000 British casualties of the day. William was one of those "casualties" and is named on the Thiepval Memorial to those soldiers with no known grave who died on the Somme. He was posthumously awarded the Victory Medal, British War Medal and the 1914-1915 Star which were received and treasured by his mother, Annie.