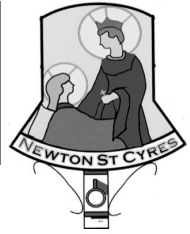


Jean Wilkins continues her tributes to WW1 heroes from the village with the story of:

PRIVATE LESLIE KNOWLES (1893 - 1916)



Leslie James Knowles was baptised on the 1st of March 1893 in Newton St Cyres Church, the son of Ellen Knowles, a domestic servant, and very probably Ellen, one of James and Maria's elder daughters. No father's name is given. It can be assumed that he was the grandson of Maria and James Knowles, tailor and shopkeepers of the Village, Newton St Cyres. Grandfather James died in March 1893 and Leslie was living with his grandmother Maria and her daughter Florence when the census was taken in 1901.

By 1911 Leslie had left home and was employed as a page boy at Stowford House Chittlehamholt (13 rooms). He shared a room with Albert Snell, the groom, in the Stables, Stowford Lodge.

In the late summer or early autumn of 1915 he married Evelyn E Shattock. They gave Laburnum Cottage, Norton Fitzwarren, Taunton as their address. This was only a short time before Private Leslie Knowles entered the theatre of war in France on the eleventh of October 1915 with the 8th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry. He had enlisted in Taunton, possibly before his marriage, as it was usual to spend some time training before going overseas.

Private Leslie Knowles was killed in action almost a year later on the third of October 1916 during the Battle of the Somme. The Somerset Light Infantry were involved in the Battle of Le Transloy and the Battle of the Ancre. The Thiepval Ridge was taken in late September 1916 and the British still pressed forward in an effort to have the front line on higher ground before the winter. It was a period of fighting in terrible weather, and the rain, fog and mud were a huge problem as they went forward over the damaged ground, all the time fighting against numerous counterattacks. The terrain had become so difficult that pack horses had to be used to deliver supplies.

Private Leslie Knowles has no known grave but his name is inscribed on the Thiepval Memorial, Pier and Face 2A. This memorial is to 72,195 missing British and 5 African servicemen who fought in the Battles of the Somme between 1915 and 1918. Leslie Knowles was twenty four years old when he was killed in action.

He is remembered locally on the Tablet and in the Memorial Window of Newton St Cyres Church.

At the time of his death, his Aunt Florrie and her husband Frank Weekes were running the village shop.