

## PRIVATE WILLIAM HENRY JOHN BREALY 1895 - 1915

William Henry Brealy, the son of John and Jessie, was born in Copplestone in 1895 and baptised as a Bible Christian in Ashreigney that December. In June 1894, his father John Brealy, an agricultural labourer from Zeal Monachorum, had married Jessie Andrews from Morchard Bishop. In 1891 father John had been living with his parents and siblings in Down St Mary.

Sometime after their marriage and by 1901 John and Jessie were living at Broadgate Court, Newton St Cyres, with their two children William aged five and Alice aged two years. John was working as a carter on a farm. The 1911 census shows the family living in Copplestone with John as a farm labourer and young William aged 15 as a baker apprentice. In the school year 1914 -15 Alice Brealy is on the evening class list as living at Laurel Cottage, Newton St Cyres, with helper at home as her occupation. So it looks as though the family had moved back to the village. Whether William lived in the village again we do not know. We do know that he entered the theatre of war in France on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August 1915 and would have spent some time training before this.

William Henry Brealy of the 8<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment died in action on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1915 during the battle of Loos, aged only nineteen. He has no known grave but is remembered on panels 35-37 of the Loos Memorial, Pas de Calais, France. John and Jessie Brealy had had seven children. William and his sister Alice had been the only ones to survive.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment were volunteers of Kitcheners New Army. What became known as the Battle of Loos was an attempt to break through the German line very near to where Captain Edward Quicke had lost his life whilst defending nearly eleven months earlier. This action was along a front to the south of the La Bassée canal in Northern France and was a joint action with the French who were attacking further to the South. By the middle of October British casualties in the offensive had reached nearly 60,000 in return for a dent in the German line some four miles long and less than two miles

deep. The 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion suffered casualties of nineteen officers and six hundred and twenty men. One of these was local man William Henry Brealy. The initial assault on the 25<sup>th</sup> September, in which he lost his life, was a success, but apparently the reserves were too few and too far back to back up the offensive. The 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Devonshires were in the front line of the initial assault but were greatly hampered by a failure of the artillery to break down sufficient enemy barbed wire leaving them only narrow passes. This was the first major engagement of the New Army and the first time the British used poison gas on the superior German positions.

William Brealy is remembered on the plaque in Newton St Cyres Church but comes at the end of the WW1 list although he was in the Devonshire Regiment. His name does not appear on the stained glass window. From this it would seem that for some reason he was a late addition.