

Private Harry Collins

23472

6th Battalion, Worcestershire Regiment.
died 7th April 1916



Harry Collins was born in March 1885 in Bromsgrove and was baptised on 29th of that month. He was the son of William Henry Collins born around 1854 also in Bromsgrove, and Mary born around 1855 in Elmbridge. Harry was the fourth of eight children; his siblings were Frederick William (born about 1879), Matilda (1881), George (1883), Mary Ellen (1887), Albert (1890), Thomas (1893) and Elizabeth Alice (1898). All of the children were born in Bromsgrove apart from Elizabeth Alice who was born in Chaddesley Corbett.

In 1891 the family lived at Randan Woods, Upton Warren near Bromsgrove and Harry's father was a general labourer. By 1901 his parents had moved to Curslow Cottages in Stone and his father was an agricultural labourer. Harry and his sister Ellen did not stay with their parents to Stone; in the 1901 census they were both general servants at the Dragon Inn at Bromsgrove Station. In 1911 his parents still lived in Stone.

Harry married Phyllis Annie Honour on 26th September 1908 at Kidderminster Register Office and the couple went on to have one son and two daughters by March 1915. Unfortunately, there is no sign of Harry and Phyllis in the 1911 census and the next record we have of Harry is a copy of his attestation papers showing that he joined the army on 5th March 1915. He is described as a farm labourer and is deemed "fit subject to dental treatment". He was given the service number 21672

We know a little about Harry from his service records; he was 5' 7" and weighed 105 pounds with a 35" chest. He had grey eyes, fair hair, a fresh complexion and a mole on the back of his right shoulder blade. He enlisted at Birmingham and his address was given as 5/290 Moseley Road in Birmingham. However, Harry did not make for a good recruit and just a month later, on 7th April 1915 he was declared "unlikely to become an efficient soldier" and was discharged. There is no information given about the reason for this decision but it seems likely to be linked to a medical issue.²

What happened to Harry next is unclear but the next sign we have of him is his death certificate. This indicates that he was in the army having joined the 6th Battalion, Worcestershire Regiment with a new service number 23472. At first I wondered if there were two different Harry Collins, but the evidence shows that it is the same man living at the same address with the same wife. Perhaps Harry was able to persuade a new recruiting officer that he was fit for service once the need for recruits became greater in early 1916.

The 6th Battalion was a special reserve battalion based at Raglan Barracks in Plymouth.



Raglan Barracks, Plymouth³

Over the first year of the war, this unit became a training organisation with new drafts of men arriving frequently to be trained up and sent to the front line. As the war progressed, the Battalion was joined by officers and men from other units convalescing after injury. As well as this frequently changing personnel, there were permanent staff mainly older officers, NCOs and men who were not fit for service in the field. This would fit with what we know about Harry although we do not know exactly what he did during his time in Plymouth.⁴

Complicating the matter slightly is Harry's obituary in the Kidderminster Shuttle which says that he died "as a result of injuries received in battle" after suffering for many months.⁵ This is hard to explain given the other available evidence. What we do know is that Harry Collins died of Pleurisy and Syncope (a temporary loss of consciousness caused by a fall in blood pressure) on 7th April 1916 in the Military Hospital in Devonport. After his death, in June 1916, his widow Phyllis received a payment of £2 3s 2d, which was the final balance of pay owed to Harry, and later in 1919 a war gratuity of £3.⁶

Harry is buried at Weston Mill Cemetery in Plymouth.⁷



Weston Mill Cemetery⁷

References

Please note that these references refer to all information in the preceding paragraphs since the previous reference, not just to the immediate sentence in which the reference number appears.

1. Grave photo: <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=df&GRid=59986730>
2. Census and military documents: <http://home.ancestry.co.uk/>
3. <http://www.cyber-heritage.co.uk/hmsdrake/>
4. http://www.worcestershireregiment.com/bat_6_1900_1913.php
5. The Kidderminster Shuttle, 22nd April 1916
6. Register of soldiers effects: <http://home.ancestry.co.uk/>
7. <http://www.cwgc.org/>