

## Walter Harrison

1896 - 1917



**Methodist minister's son**

**Educated at Kingswood School, Bath, and Merton College Oxford**

**Died at the Somme, aged 20, on 20 July 1916**

### **Family and Education**

Walter Bernard Harrison was born on 25 January 1896 in Bolton, Lancashire. He was the second son of the Rev Frank Wesley and Louisa nee Allen of Patricroft, Manchester. In 1901 the family were living in Southborough, Kent. Like many sons of ministers, who were required to move home frequently, he became a boarder at Kingswood School in Bath, a Methodist foundation.

Walter won many school prizes and gained an Open Classical Exhibition at Merton College Oxford. He began his studies in 1914, and joined the University Officers' Training Corps. 'All his instincts were against military service, but he could not resist the call of duty', and after one year of his course he enlisted in July 1915.

### **War Service: 20<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion (3<sup>rd</sup> Public Schools), Royal Fusiliers**

Walter joined a Public Schools battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, as a Private. It was noted that the men in these battalions 'were all enormously keen on their drill', and they were a fertile source of officer material to other regiments. But Walter did not want additional responsibility and chose to remain as a Private.

Walter's battalion landed in France on 14 November 1915, and he was in the trenches for six months. In May 1916 he returned home for a week's leave, and his parents were impressed with how he had matured: afterwards they treasured the memories of those days.

Walter was back at the front for the start of the Battle of the Somme in July 1916. As a private he would have been less exposed to danger than as a junior officer, and he survived his first two engagements. He wrote home of his satisfaction in playing his part in the fighting, not just doing errands behind the lines. However, on 20 July he took part in an early-morning attack at High Wood (the Bois des Foureaux), a scene of many casualties. He was killed by shell fire, 'right up at the front in the big push', as his officer wrote to his parents. He was aged 20, and is buried nearby in an unmarked grave. He is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial.

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This is the story of one of the men who appear on a war memorial at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church in Oxford, UK. These stories were compiled in 2018-19 from a variety of family history and military sources. In particular, Chris Baker's site, 'The Long, Long Trail' has provided valuable details of the men's experience of battle:

<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/>

Walter Harrison's story incorporates details from Kingswood Magazine, kindly provided by the Kingswood School Archivist.

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