

William Chandler

1892 - 1917

Born in Summertown

Educated at Oxford Boys' High School

Ironmonger's assistant in Bedford

Died in Headington of infection/wounds, aged 25, on 13 March 1917

Family and Education

William Frederick Chandler was born in Summertown on 20 February 1892. He was the first of three children born to William Henry Chandler and Clara Jane Gregory. Their marriage banns in 1891 had been called in St Paul's Church in Oxford, as William senior was living in that parish (having been born in Hampshire). The newly-weds moved to a house then numbered 3 Banbury Road. By 1901 they were in Beechcroft Road, and William senior was a grocer's manager.

From age 12 to 14 William went to Oxford Boys' High School as a Free Scholar, then left to become an under-assistant in the Bodleian Library. However shortly afterwards he was apprenticed to an ironmonger, and by 1911 he was an ironmonger's assistant in Thame, aged 19. Subsequently he moved to work for a company in Bedford.

War Service: 44th Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps

William enlisted in 1916 and served as a Corporal in the 44th Field Ambulance of the Royal Army Medical Corps. This was a mobile front-line medical unit, and was not armed. It was one of three Ambulance units assigned to the 14th Light Division which drew together battalions from all around the country, including the 5th Battalion of the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry.

In August 1916 the division fought in the Battle of Delville Wood and the Battle of Flers-Courcelette, when tanks were used for the first time. These actions formed part of the Battle of the Somme, in which the 44th unit lost 8 men compared with their colleagues the 43rd who lost three, and the 42nd who lost two: they must have been well in the front line.

The division was not in action again until March 1917. But by then William had died in Oxford and was buried at Wolvercote on 13 March. It is likely that he caught some kind of infection - perhaps over the winter or from one of the sick people he was caring for - and was invalided out and back to England. His death, aged 25, was recorded in the Headington registration district which included Summertown. So he may have been at home, and he was certainly near enough for his family to be with him at the end. He is listed on the Oxford Boys' High School war memorial.

Both William's brothers served in the war and survived: Charles's daughter Vera Mary was baptised at Walton Street Methodist Church in 1921, and Charles ran the family grocery at 56 St Giles (now an Oxfam bookshop) from 1932 to 1945.

Both brothers died in Oxford in the 1970s.

This is the story of one of the men who appear on the war memorial of Walton Street Methodist Church, which can now be seen at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church in Oxford, UK. These stories were compiled in 2019 based on detailed research by Stephanie Jenkins (http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/war/walton_street_chapel/index.html), supplemented by information from a variety of military sources.