

Joseph Harris

1898 - 1916

Moved to Oxford as a child

Enlisted aged 16

Died at Pozieres, aged 17, on 23 July 1916

Family

Joseph Francis Harris was born at Vauxhall, Surrey, near the end of 1898. His father was Charles Harris, a gas fitter, and his mother was Alice Emma Jones. Both had been born in Oxford and Alice had apparently been a printer's machine girl at Oxford University Press. They were married in London and Joseph was the first of their five children. In about 1903 the family moved to Jericho, Oxford, where by 1911 Joseph's father had become a bookcase enameller in an iron foundry.

War Service: 1/4 Battalion, Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry

Joseph enlisted in Oxford as a Private, and eventually fought in the 1/4 Battalion of the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. This unit reached France on 30 March 1915 when Joseph was still only 16 and so under the minimum recruitment age. His date of enlistment is unclear, but he seems to have evaded the age rule as he began with a 4-digit service number, and these stopped being issued early in 1915.

Joseph seems to have managed to go overseas in 1916 (he was not awarded a 1914-15 Star). By then his unit had become part of 48th South Midlands Division but had not yet seen action. They remained in training and reserve until the intense fighting of the Battle of the Somme in July 1916. The unit was deployed in a series of battles that month where there were large numbers of casualties. Joseph survived two battles but was killed at the start of the Battle of Pozieres on 23 July 1916, at the age of 17. He was still too young to be there, as the minimum age for overseas service was meant to be 19. His body was not recovered and he is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial, and also at St Barnabas Church in Oxford. Joseph's brother Hubert died in Oxford in 1980.

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 research by Stephanie Jenkins (http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/war/walton_street_chapel/index.html), supplemented by information from a variety of military sources.