

Harold Parry

1896 - 1917



Educated at Queen Mary's Grammar School, Walsall, and Exeter College Oxford

War poet

Died at Ypres, aged 20, on 6 May 1917

Family and Education

Harold Parry ('Hal' to his friends) was born on 13 December 1896, in Bloxwich, Walsall, one of twins. He was the son of mine engineer, colliery proprietor and landowner Alderman David Ebenezer Parry, and Sarah Parry, of 'Croxdene', Bloxwich. He attended a junior school in Bloxwich, probably the National School, High Street. He won a scholarship to Queen Mary's Grammar School, Walsall, and became an outstanding pupil, head of his house and captain of the school's football and cricket teams, as well as a cadet officer. He won the school's Queen's Prize for History, and in 1915 gained an Open History Scholarship to Exeter College, Oxford.

As soon as he started at Oxford in October 1915, Harold joined the University Officer Training Corps, and after only a term of study, in January 1916 he volunteered for army service. He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, and after training at Rugeley he transferred to the 17th Battalion of the King's Royal Rifle Corps, which had been formed by the British Empire League.

War Service: 17th (Service) Battalion (British Empire League), Kings Royal Rifle Corps

This battalion came under orders of 117th Brigade in 39th Division, and landed at Le Havre on 8 March 1916. The unit was involved in the attack near Richebourg l'Avoue on 30 June, and then in various battles of the Somme, particularly at the Ancre. Even before the war Harold had been writing poetry, and he continued to do so in the trenches. Unusually for

World War I poets he experienced the long-drawn-out final stages of the fighting at the Somme. He wrote home to his sister:

'The whole of the war zone is so un-Christian in its aspect and so horrible in its antithesis to all that is beautiful and good that I would rather not write about it. I do my best to forget and, in a measure, to forgive it by reading Keats, Blake, Swinburne or Housman, and even by attempts to write poems':

Harold was killed by a German shell at Ypres, on 6 May 1917, while moving from his billet to safer quarters in the cellars nearby. He was aged 20.

Writing to Harold's father, his commanding officer said: 'He was a splendid youngster, and a most capable and keen officer, much loved by all. Had he been spared I am sure he would have made a great name for himself as a soldier'.

Harold is buried at Vlamertinghe Military Cemetery, West Flanders, Belgium. His headstone bears the inscription 'Death is the Gate to the High Road of Life and Love is the Way (Harold Parry)'.

Harold was an exceptionally gifted poet, as can be seen in the volume of his letters and poems compiled by G P Dennis 'In Memoriam: Harold Parry', 1918. The letters show above all his extreme cheerfulness and loyalty, even in the face of danger and death. Some of his poems are also published in 'Songs from the Heart of England', 1920, an anthology of Walsall poetry edited by Alfred Moss with a foreword by Jerome K Jerome.

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/>

Much of the information about Harold Parry comes from:

<https://thebloxwichtelegraph.com/2017/05/05/remembering-harold-parry-100-years-on/> . The photograph (out of copyright) is from 'For Remembrance: Soldier Poets Who Have Fallen in the War' by A. St John Adcock, published in 1920 by Hodder and Stoughton (opposite p. 80); and the quotation from the letter to Harold's sister is from p. 78 of the same book.