

Born Cofton, Jan – Mar 1896, Died 8 November 1914, aged 18

Samuel was the youngest of eight children of William Pillar (1854-1900), a farm labourer, and Bessie Collings (1855-1922). The parents were born in Holcombe and the children born in Dawlish and Cofton (1901 census return). In 1891 William and Bessie were living at Cofton Cottages with five children, Alice M, 6, Rose E, 5, William G, 4, Bessie, 3, and Florence, 1.

William Pillar, the father, died Q2, 1900. In 1901 Bessie is shown in the Census as a widow aged 45, living in Park Row, Dawlish and working as a Charwoman, Parish Relief, with three more children, Robert, 9, Francis, daughter, 7, and **Samuel**, the youngest at 5 years old. The three youngest are shown as being born in Starcross (Cofton).

By 1911 Bessie Pillar was living at 22 Old Town Street, Dawlish with Rose Ellen Mary, 25, being engaged in Dressmaking, Robert George, 19, being a gardener, and **Samuel** is 15 with no occupation shown. It seems that soon after his 16th birthday **Samuel** enlisted with the **Coldstream Guards, 2nd Battalion** as a Private, service no: 9437. An army career was often seen as offering better prospects than casual labouring. At the outbreak of War his regiment formed part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF).

The Ypres Salient was formed during the First Battle of Ypres in October and November 1914, when a small BEF succeeded in securing the town before the onset of winter, pushing the German forces back to the Passchendaele Ridge. The Coldstream Guards had been moved to Polygon Wood on 25th October and remained there for at least three weeks, during which time **Samuel** was killed in close fighting.

The Exeter and Plymouth Gazette of Monday 30 November, 1914, reported, "Mrs Pillar, of Old-town-street, Dawlish, has been notified officially that her son, Samuel, was killed in Belgium on November 8th. Deceased enlisted in the Coldstream Guards just over two years ago. He was aged 19. Much sympathy is expressed with Mrs Pillar and her sons and daughters." Nothing has been found of the manner of his death. The Menin Gate is one of four memorials to the missing in Belgian Flanders which includes the Ypres Salient.

The names of the dead, known at this time, follows:

Born Dawlish Q1 1885, died 24 October 1914, aged 29

John F Wills was born to Joseph (1848 – 1910) and Rebecca Sarah Wills (nee Lucas)(1854 – 1932). Joseph was a Farm Labourer and Sarah a Laundress in 1891 (Census), with five children, three of school age, living in Ashcombe Road, Dawlish. By 1901 they had moved to 25 Old Town Street and Joseph was Driver of a Milk Dray. They had six children.

In 1911 Rebecca was a widow and domestic worker, age 56, with **John (known as Jack)**, 26, single, a Farm Labourer; Joseph (known as Jim), 18, single, a gardener.

JF Wills enlisted at Exeter with his brother, James. He was a Private, Service No 7380 in the Devonshire Regiment, 1st Battalion at the time of his death, aged 29.

In a letter home from hospital, Jim wrote to his mother. *He states that he and his brother were fighting last Saturday side by side in a trench. A shell exploded quite close to them, and a second carried away part of the bank of the trench. A third dropped just as they were congratulating each other on their escape, and Jack was killed instantly.*

This part of the Western Front was the scene of some of the heaviest fighting of the first year of the war, including the battle of La Bassée (10 October – 2 November 1914).

The Battle of Coronel, 1st November 1914

Three sailors from Dawlish lost their lives in the Battle of Coronel on November 1st, 1914. This was the first major setback in Naval operations of World War One, when two British cruisers were sunk with the loss of nearly 1,600 men.

Arthur Henry BEARNE was an Officer's Steward in H.M.S. GOOD-HOPE, a cruiser of 14,000 tons and built in 1902. In peaceful conditions Arthur Bearne would have kept meals flowing and looked after the ship's company of officers, but at battle stations he would have been part of the first-aid team working with the ship's doctor. He had left his wife, Ethel Maud Bearne and their young son, Ronald Arthur Bearne, at 1 Portland Terrace, Dawlish. Ronald's daughter married and lives still in South Devon.

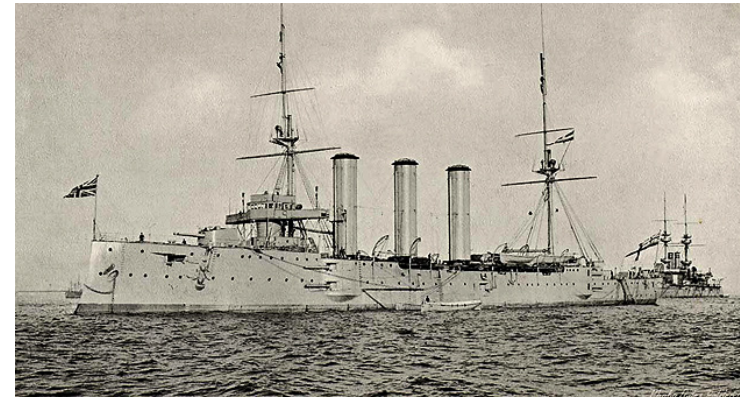


H.M.S.GOOD-HOPE, cruiser with 2 x 9.2" and 16 x 6" guns, flagship of Rear-Admiral Cradock

Francis Ernest RICHARDS had been a Coastguard for just over two years when he was appointed to the Dawlish Coastguard station in February 1914. He was 32 years old, and only months later he was called up as a Leading Seaman (Coastguard) to serve aboard H.M.S.MONMOUTH, a cruiser of 9,800 tons and less heavily armed than the GOOD-HOPE.

Frederick Albert DAVIS was one of nine children of John G Davis, who married again after the death of his first wife. John was a carpenter and joiner who lived at Manor Cottages, Dawlish. Frederick was one of six sons, all born in Dawlish from the two marriages, who had enlisted by November 1914. Frederick had joined the Royal Marines by 1901, when he was 18, and he was stationed at the Royal Marine Barracks, Durnford Street, Stonehouse. In 1908 he married Edith Bessie Wright at St Peter's, Plymouth, and they had a daughter, Phyllis Mary Davis in 1909. Frederick's daughter married Edwin Charles Radmore in St Matthew, Stonehouse, in April 1930.

By the outbreak of war Frederick had been promoted to Sergeant in the Royal Marine Light Infantry and was serving in H.M.S.MONMOUTH when she sailed to the South Pacific. Royal Marines served as guns' crews at battle stations at sea, and as infantrymen if detachments were sent ashore.



H.M.S.MONMOUTH, cruiser with 14 x 6" guns

A British cruiser squadron, commanded by Rear-Admiral Sir Christopher Cradock in H.M.S.GOOD-HOPE, had been sent to look for a similar German squadron, under the command of Vice-Admiral Maximilian Graf von Spee in S.M.S.SCHARNHORST. They met in the South Pacific, off the coast of Chile near the city of Coronel, and the battle was devastating for the British navy, as two cruisers were sunk by German gunfire and all hands were lost in the heavy seas. The engagement started towards sunset in a stormy sea, with heavy clouds and driving showers that hid the targets from gun aimers. At first the German ships were shown clearly by the setting sun and the British ships, to westward, were hidden in the glare of the sun. However, once the sun set the British ships were silhouetted against a lighter sky and the German cruisers disappeared against a darkening night sky, and they soon found their range on the flagship GOOD HOPE which sustained a hit on the forward turret, taking the 9.2" gun out of the action. The German cruiser GNEISENAU had won the Kaiser prize for shooting in the previous year, and hit the second British cruiser MONMOUTH. The British light cruiser, GLASGOW, was being targeted by the two German light cruisers, LEIPZIG and DRESDEN, but she managed to escape in the darkness. The action had started at around 6.30pm and by 7.45pm the GOOD HOPE was on fire with flames around the bridge deck, until a huge explosion in her fore part tore the ship apart. At around 9pm the German light cruiser NURNBERG came across the MONMOUTH, and she opened fire at close range. The British cruiser could not use her port guns due to her list, and after another pass by the NURNBERG, she capsized and sank with flags still flying.