

William BROWNING

Born Dawlish, Q2,1897
Private 11255

Died 1 July 1916, aged 19
8th Battalion, Devonshire Regiment

William Browning was the second son of James Browning (1864-1918) and Fanny Langdon (1859-1954). James had been born in Throwleigh where his father, William, had been an agricultural labourer (1871) and had married Eliza. Both of their parents had been born in Sampford Courtenay.

In 1881 James was 16 and an "indoor servant" to a farmer, William French of Charlwood, Ashcombe.

In 1891 William and Eliza had moved to Queen Lane, Dawlish where he was described as a "dairyman" and James, 27, was an agricultural labourer.

James married Fanny Langdon in Q2, 1893 (Newton Abbot district, Vol 5b, p324) and they had six children between then and 1911, although two had died.

The survivors were James (1895-), **William** (1897-1916), Dorothy Eliza (1898-1960) and John Langdon (1904-1990).

Fanny Langdon was born to John Langdon, a shoemaker, and Elizabeth Langdon in Liskeard, Cornwall. After leaving school she moved away taking work as a domestic servant and in 1891 was Cook to the household of Georgina Pike at 1 Oak Park Villas, East Cliff, Dawlish.

In 1901 the family were living at 6 Commercial Road, Dawlish and James was now working as a Town Porter for the GWR.

By 1911 the whole family had moved to 2 Brunswick Terrace, Torre, Torquay where James, 46, was once again a farm labourer, James, 16, was a grocer's apprentice, **William**, 14, was an errand boy and the younger children were at school.

There is little to find about **William's** Army career, but we know that he served in France and he arrived there on the 8th December 1915.

The Devonshire Regiment would have been refreshed by new trainees after the losses of the Battle of Loos (25 September 1915) and they were part of the Somme offensive of 1st July 1916.

In the opening phase the British assault broke into and gradually moved beyond the first of the German defensive complexes on the Somme. Success on the first day in the area between Montauban and Mametz led to a redirection of effort to that area, for the initial attack was defeated with huge losses north of Mametz. There was a stiff fight for Trones Wood and costly, hastily planned and piecemeal attacks that eventually took La Boisselle, Contalmaison and Mametz Wood.

Mametz was within the German lines until 1 July 1916 when it was captured by the 7th Division, and Mametz Wood, north-east of the village, was cleared on the days following 7 July.

The 8th and 9th Battalions of the Devonshire Regiments, which were part of the 7th Division, attacked on 1 July 1916 from a point on the south-west side of Albert-Maricourt road, due south of Mametz village, by a plantation called Mansel Copse. On 4 July they returned this location and established a cemetery, burying their dead in a section of their old front line trench. All but two of the burials belong to these battalions.

Devonshire Cemetery contains 163 Commonwealth burials of the First World War, ten of which are unidentified.

Commonwealth War Graves entry: W.Browning Private 11255 Died 1.7.16 Devonshire Regiment, 8th Battalion.

William Browning is not recorded on the Devon Roll of Honour for Dawlish, nor is he on the Dawlish Boys' School, Roll of Honour despite being born here and spending his early years in Dawlish.

He is shown on the St Marychurch, War Memorial, Torquay.

Devon Heritage site info: The following appears on the St Marychurch, Torquay War Memorial description.

W. BROWNING	11255 Private William Browning of the 8th battalion, the Devonshire Regiment. Son of James and Fanny Brough of Chelston. Born in Dawlish in 1897. Died 1 July 1916 aged 19.
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The headstones placed in the Devonshire Cemetery at Mametz by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission do not mark actual graves. These men were buried where they had fallen late on in the evening of July 1st 1916 by a working party led by the Padre; the headstones were added later.

153 men of all ranks are commemorated in the Devonshire Cemetery, all but two being members of the 8th and 9th Battalions of the Devonshire Regiment. Driver Fred Lambert and Sergeant D. Wright, both of the Royal Field Artillery, were interred here later.

21 of the men from the 8th Battalion who lie here are believed to have been born in Devon. A further 44 Devon-born men from the 9th Battalion are also buried in the Mametz Cemetery. (Devon Heritage)

William Browning was awarded the 1915 Star, Victory Medal and British War Medal

References: BMD and census records. CWGC site
UK, WW1, Service Medal and Award Rolls and Medal Roll Index Cards
Browning family tree (Ancestry)

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