

Henry MAY

Born: Thorverton, Q1, 1886
Private, 16549
Previously Private 53432

Died 22nd May 1917, France, aged 31
Hampshire Regt, 2nd Battalion
Royal Garrison Artillery

Henry May was from a family long established in Thorverton, part of the Tiverton registration district. His father, William, was born there ca.1832 and died in the district in 1905, aged 73 . William was a Master Mason and married Emma Western (1838-1902) ca 1858. They had nine children, all born in Thorverton:

Emily Mary May (1859-)
Louisa Western May (1861-)
Henry May (1864-)
William (1866-)
Tom (1870-)
Walter (1872-)
Eva (1878-)
Alice (1882-) and

Henry (1886-1917)(GRO ref birth 1886, Jan-Mar, Tiverton, vol 5b, p 121).

In 1871 they were living at Silver Street, Thorverton and William was a Mason Master and employer, while his wife Emma is shown as a grocer. At that point Tom was their youngest child. They had settled in Brooke Terrace, Thorverton in 1881, and were still providing a home for Louisa, Henry (now also a mason), Tom, Walter and Eva.

In 1891 they were at Brooke Terrace and William, 59, is shown as a builder/innkeeper and Walter, 19, has become a wheelwright, with Eva, 13, Alice, 9, and **Henry, 5**, still at school. Emma May was about 48 when her last child, **Henry**, was born.

In 1901 at Buller Street, Thorverton, William (Senior), 69, is shown as retired, Tom, 32, is a stonemason, Walter, 29, is a wheelwright and **Henry/Harry, 16**, is a carpenter's apprentice. Next door, William (Junior)(1866-) is a stonemason and is married to Elisabeth from Torrington with four children, Isaac, son, 9, Gertrude, dau, 7, Walter C, son, 5, and Florence, dau, 2.

Henry's parents died in 1902 (Emma, GRO ref Tiverton Sept 1902, vol 5b, p 243) and 1905 (Henry, GRO ref Tiverton 1905 Jan-Mar Vol 5b, p 314).

Henry and Florence Sweet married in 1908 in Exeter (GRO ref Q4, 1908, Vol 5b, p 214).

Florence (b.Cullompton ca.1886) was a daughter of Julia Sweet (b. Port Isaac, N Cornwall, ca 1842), a widow in 1891 and 1911. The 1911 census shows **Henry May**, 24, and Florence living with Henry's mother-in-law Julia Sweet, 69 at No 4 Crown Court, Pancras Lane, Exeter. They had two children Albert, 3 and Beatrice, 1, both recorded as being born in Exeter and grandchildren of Julia Sweet. Florence Beatrice May's birth is recorded in 1909 (GRO ref Exeter, Q4,1909, vol 5b, p 70). **Henry** is at this time a bricklayer.

At some time after April 1911, when the census took place, **Henry** and Florence moved to Dawlish and they had two more children. The notice of his death in the *Dawlish Gazette* records their home as being in Chapel Street (see 'Documents' below). Chapel Street was so named

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because of the Congregational Chapel there, and it is now known as Albert Street being a continuation of the Strand westwards. It is possible that **Henry** and Florence moved their family to Dawlish because of his work as a bricklayer, and possibly to set up home on their own. The entry of his name on the town War Memorial suggests that his widow remained in the town after his death.

Henry enlisted at Exeter from his residence in Dawlish. One record shows that he was first with the Royal Garrison Artillery, Private 53432. He was transferred to the Hampshire Regiment. The 2nd Battn is shown as being engaged during 1917 in the First, Second and Third Battles of the Scarpe, The Battle of Langemarck, The Battle of Broodseinde, The Battle of Poelcapelle, The Battle of Cambrai. The fact that **Henry** is shown on the Arras Memorial suggests that he died during the Battle of Arras in the April – May actions, and this appears to be the case from the letter quoted by the *Dawlish Gazette*.

Henry May is shown on the Devon Roll of Honour: Herbert May, Pte, Hants Regt – no date of death or location shown. (The Christian name Herbert appears to be an error as the Commonwealth War Graves entry show him to be Henry.)

Dawlish War memorial inscription: MAY H. PTE. HANTS.REGT.

Devon Heritage site info:

16549 Private Henry May of the 2nd Battalion, the Hampshire Regiment. Son of William and Emma May. Born in Thorverton in the March Quarter of 1887. Died 27 August 1918 aged 31. (*Dates of birth and death incorrect-ed*)

Commonwealth War Graves entry:

MAY, HENRY Private 16549 22/05/1917
Hampshire Regiment, 2nd Bn. Panel Ref: Bay 6. [Arras Memorial](#), France

UK Soldiers died in the Great War, 1914-1919:

Henry May,, born Thorverton, Devon, Residence Dawlish, Devon. Died: 22 May 1917
France & Flanders Killed in action Enlisted: Exeter. Private 16549 Hampshire
Regiment, 2nd Battalion, Formerly 53432, Royal Garrison Artillery.

Last known address: Chapel Street, Dawlish

Next of kin: Florence May, wife. His widow received the Death Grant of £7. 5s. 8d. And a War Gratuity of £11. 10s. 0d.

References:

Free Birth Marriage Death records

Dawlish Gazette, 2 June 1917

Refs via subscription sites:

Census records

Forces War Records – Killed in Action, France

UK, Soldiers died in the Great War, 1914-1919

UK, Service Medal and Award Rolls, awarded British War Medal and Victory Medal, and 1914-15 Star

UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects

Matthews Family Tree