

COMMEMORATING THE DEATH OF

William Henry Pitts

Lance Sergeant, Machine Gun Corps



Who died in Flanders, 22nd June 1917, aged 29



Dawlish World War One Project 1914-18 / 2014-18
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Dawlish Town Council
www.dawlishww1.org.uk



Welcome to this Act of Commemoration.

Dawlish Town Council and Churches Together in Dawlish and District are commemorating the death in the service of the nation of every Dawlish person who was killed as a result of enemy action during the First World War.

Today we remember the death of William Henry Pltts who volunteered for action but died on 22nd June 1917.

After the First World War, it was decided in Dawlish that a single town War Memorial would be erected close to the parish church, and no church would have its own War Memorial. In keeping with this decision, these Acts of Commemoration take place in the town centre churches without regard to the denomination of the person they commemorate and they are led by a minister or pastor of the host church. The same Order of Service is used at each service. When we remember men listed on the War Memorials in St. Mary's Cofton or St. George's Holcombe, the service is held in the appropriate village church.

There will be opportunity to talk to the leader of the service afterwards when light refreshments will be served. You are invited to take a reproduction of St John's Gospel which was given to every service person during the First World War.

Please join in the words which are in **heavy type**.

Churches Together in Dawlish & District
28 High Street,
Dawlish, EX7 9HP

THE ORDER OF SERVICE

Introduction

We have gathered today as part of our commemoration of those Dawlish people who were caught up in the courageous but tragic events of the First World War.

We remember those who were killed in action,
those who were maimed and those whose minds were disfigured
by conflict.
the bereaved and the lost and those who lived in darkness,
the families which were shattered,
and all who held in silence the unspeakable memories of warfare.

In particular today on the 100th anniversary of his death we remember William Henry Pitts who died in action while in the service of his country.

Prayer

Almighty God, the Lord of all,
today we pause to remember with gratitude
the life and death of William Henry Pitts
knowing that he was, is and always will be
known and loved by you.

We thank you for his willingness to fight for our country
even if necessary to the point of death.

And today we remember his family and friends
who grieved at his death
and whose lives were never the same.

Amen.

We hear about the life and death of William Henry Pitts

Reading Romans 8:31-39

What, then, shall we say? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord

please stand

A prayer of Commemoration

We remember before God William Henry Pitts

Lord, have mercy

Today we commit William Henry Pitts to the love of God

We give thanks for his life, and grieve at his death

May he rest in peace

and rise In glory.

He shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;

age shall not weary him, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning,

we will remember him.

We will remember him.

A candle may be lit or a bouquet may be placed before the pieta.

A time of silence

We remain standing

The Commitment to all those who died in the service of the nation.

Lord God, Father of all,
in thankfulness for William Henry Pitts
and in his memory
we pledge ourselves
to bring comfort to the sad, the lonely and the distressed;
to bring relief to all who are in need
and to serve you and to work for peace.
Keep us ever mindful of the struggles
and achievements of former generations
and so make us grateful
now and in the days to come.
Amen

O Lord, our maker and our strength,
from whose love in Christ we can never be parted
either by death or life:
Look in mercy on those for whom we pray this day,
and grant us your protection and peace,
that we may be saved in body and soul,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

As we ask for deliverance from the forces of destruction
and for peace in our time and In our lives
we pray together:

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever.
AMEN.

The Blessing

God grant to the living grace,
to the departed rest,
to the Church, the Queen,
the Commonwealth and all the world
peace and concord:

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.

Amen.

William Henry PITTS

Born in Kenton, Q4, 1887

Killed in action, Flanders, 22 June 1917

Private 7882

Devonshire Regiment

Lance Sergeant, 17565

Machine Gun Corps (Infantry)

William Henry Pitts was the son of Edward Elston and Mary Ann Pitts. Edward Elston Pitts (1858-1934) started life in the Union Workhouse in Crediton where, at the age of two, he was described as a 'scholar' in the 1861 census, with others of the same surname including his mother Charlotte.

Charlotte is the only named parent of Edward Elston Pitts, who was born in Crediton. He appears again, aged 14, at Crediton Union Workhouse in 1871 census and there is also a Harry Pitts, 6, also born in Crediton. His mother, Charlotte, appears to have married Edward Webb on 4 August 1869 in Wandsworth Surrey (now London), and they went on to have seven children and remained in Wandsworth until her death in 1919 at the age of 77. **William Henry Pitts** stayed in Devon.

Edward Pitts broke free when he was 19 and married Mary Ann Fawdon in 1878. Edward was a farm labourer when they set up home in Marldon and started a family. By the time they had moved to Port Road, Dawlish in 1901 they had seven children and **William Henry Pitts (1887-1917)** was their fifth child, born in Kenton.

In 1914, **William** married Ethel Beatrice Westcott in Exeter. The Westcott family had moved to Middlewood, Dawlish and Ethel's father, George H P Westcott was a pensioner of the Metropolitan Water Board.

William Henry Pitts joined the Devonshire Regiment with a service no. 7882. It appears likely that he was with the 1st Battalion which had been stationed on Jersey since 1911. On 21st August 1914 they landed at Le Havre, where they were reinforced by nearly 500 reservists from Exeter.

This accords with the Medal Roll Index Card for William H Pitts that shows his "date of entry" (France) as 22-8-14 which entitled him to the award of the 1914 Star.

In September 1914, during their first spell in the line, the 1st Devonshire Regiment suffered 100 casualties from shelling. In October on the La Basse Canal they supported the badly mauled 1st Dorsets and helped capture Givenchy Ridge. The Devons performed well during a bitter three-week battle but lost two thirds of their officers and a third of their men. From November they occupied Messines Ridge in rain and sleet, often knee- or waist-deep in mud and icy water.

There are no surviving records which show when **William Henry Pitts** transferred to the Machine Gun Corps. The Medal Roll Index Card hints that he was no more than a Private with the 1st Devons, and this suggests that he may have transferred to the Machine Gun Corps (Infantry) soon after its formation in October 1914. He held the rank of Lance Sergeant at the time of his death in action on 22nd June 1917, aged 29.

William Henry Pitts is remembered on the Menin Gate Memorial which bears the names of more than 54,000 officers and men whose graves are not known. Ypres (now Ieper) is a town in the Province of West Flanders. The Memorial is situated at the eastern side of the town on the road to Menin (Menen) and Courtrai (Kortrijk).

Each night at 8 pm the traffic is stopped at the Menin Gate while members of the local Fire Brigade sound the Last Post in the roadway under the Memorial's arches.

The site of the Menin Gate was chosen because of the hundreds of thousands of men who passed through it on their way to the battlefields. It commemorates casualties from the forces of Australia, Canada, India, South Africa and United Kingdom who died in the Salient.

After **William's** death, Ethel Pitts married Alfred Bowles in Oct-Dec 1920 and the CWGC website records her address as 8 Battle Road, Erith, Kent.

'rbv 29-5-2017