

## COMMEMORATING THE DEATH OF

**Wilfred Claude Williams**

Private, Tank Corps



Who died in Flanders on  
31<sup>st</sup> July 1917, aged 20



Dawlish World War One Project 1914-18 / 2014-18

Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and  
Dawlish Town Council

[www.dawlishww1.org.uk](http://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 Wilfred Claude Williams who volunteered for action but died on 31<sup>st</sup> July 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 may be served (This is not possible at the Cemetery Chapel). 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 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death we remember  
Wilfred Claude Williams who died in action on the first day of the  
Third Battle of Ypres 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 Wilfred Claude Williams  
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 Wilfred Claude Williams

**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 Wilfred Claude Williams  
**Lord, have mercy**

Today we commit Wilfred Claude Williams 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 Wilfred Claude Williams  
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.**

## The life of Wilfred Claude Williams

1897 - 31 July 1917

Wilfred Claude Williams was the son of John and Bessie Williams. Wilfred was born in Dawlish, his mother's home town, and he was baptised in St Mark's Church (since demolished) on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1897. His father, John, is described in the register as a grocer and the mother is Bessie. The marriage register of Bessie and John shows that John Williams' father was Thomas Williams and reference to the 1881 census shows John Williams living in Beach Cottage, Dawlish, as a Grocer's Assistant, born in Bodmin, Cornwall.

Bessie Williams, nee Slocombe, was born in 1870 and Baptised in St Gregory the Great on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1870. In the 1871 census the family were living at No 3 Brunswick Place, Dawlish, where the father, John Slocombe, 38, is a plasterer and Rose, his wife, 38, is a housekeeper. There were six children with them.

Bessie Slocombe married John Williams, in St Gregory the Great, Dawlish on 21 March 1896. It appears that John Williams died in 1898, aged 28. Bessie can be found in 1901 with her son at the home of her sister Annie Maria and brother-in-law, Alfred W Lane, at 39 Fest Road, Kingston-upon-Thames. Alfred was a hairdresser, a mobile occupation, and they may have moved back to an area that he knew well from childhood. They had four children and Bessie was there with **Wilfred Williams**, 4, nephew to the Lane family.

In 1905 Bessie Williams married once more, to Charles Christopher Pound, another hairdresser, conducting his business at 17, the Strand, Dawlish. It would appear that Pound had been married previously.

In 1911 the census shows the household:

Charles Pound, 48, hairdresser (born in Torquay), Bessie Pound, 38, **Wilfred C Williams**, 14, step-son and apprentice hairdresser and Cyril W Pound, 4, son, born in Teignmouth.

Bessie Pound died on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1944, aged 73, and left her effects to Cyril Williams Pound, dental practitioner.

There are no surviving records to show when **Wilfred** enlisted at Exeter. From the following account of the formation of the Royal Tank Corps he may have first joined the Machine Gun Corps. "*Through mud and blood to the green fields beyond*". - Tank Corps motto.

Tanks were used for the first time in action on the battlefield of the Somme on 15 September 1916. 36 Mark 1 tanks of C and D Companies arrived on the start line for the renewal of the Somme offensive: this action was later designated as the Battle of Flers-Courcelette. The Heavy Section Machine Gun Corps was redesignated as the *Heavy Branch MGC* in November 1916.

The *Tank Corps* was formed from the Heavy Branch MGC on 27 July 1917, just before the new offensive.

By summer 1917 tank numbers had increased and the better Mark IV's were available. Sadly, the tanks' deployment in the Third Battle of Ypres, which began on 31 July, proved to be another slog through deep mud. The offensive began with encouraging gains but terrible summer weather soon bogged it down. The battle front was deeply pitted with shell holes and unseasonal rain fell heavily before and during the first days of the battle. The area became a tank graveyard as machine after machine ditched in deep trenches and shell holes, sank, stuck and was shelled.

The front extended NW and SE from the city of Ypres, which lay in allied hands. By August the offensive was clearly failing in its objectives and had descended into attritional fighting. The Germans had been constructing a strong defensive line and a series of allied assaults eventually halted at the village of Passchendaele on 26<sup>th</sup> November. New techniques by both sides led to agonisingly slow forward movement for the British, at enormous cost in casualties to both sides.

**Private Wilfred Claude Williams** was 20 years old when he lost his life on the opening day of the assault at Ypres, and he is recorded among those on the Menin Gate memorial.