

**Private William Darch 2546, 1st/6th Battalion Devonshire Regiment and
Private Walter Charles Darch 345918, 16th Battalion Devonshire Regiment**



The war memorial plaque in Pilton Church lists three Darches who died in the Great War, two of whom were brothers. The first brother was Private William Darch, the son of Thomas and Jane Darch of Pilton Street, Pilton. He was a sawyer and liner employed at the Barnstaple Cabinet Works in Newport. He was married in Pilton Church on 30th May 1914 to Ethel Mary Gratton and lived at 26 Pilton Street. A pupil of Pilton Church School, he was known locally as a clever whist player and a member of a local football team. He enlisted in the 1st/6th Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment early in the war and served first in India and then Basra in Mesopotamia. It is there that he eventually succumbed to malaria coupled with yellow fever on 17th December 1916 at the age of 29 and was buried in the Basra War Cemetery in Iraq. Like Ronald Frayne, who also served in Mesopotamia, William Darch is also remembered on the brass plaque in Pilton Church, the Devons' memorial in Barnstaple Guildhall and the family gravestone in the small Pilton Churchyard (left). And like another casualty of the Great War, Harry Fry Vicary, he is also commemorated on the Roll of Honour of the Barnstaple Cabinet Works.

A year after his death, his family wrote:

In affectionate remembrance of William Darch, the dearly beloved husband of Ethel Mary Darch of 26 Pilton Street, Barnstaple, who passed peacefully away at the General Hospital, Basra, Mesopotamia, 17th December 1916.

*There's a beautiful land on high,
And my dearest its bliss does enjoy.
Methinks I now see, how he's waiting for me,
In that beautiful land on high.*

*There's a beautiful land on high,
And though here I oft weep and sigh.
My Jesus hath said that no tears will be shed,
In that beautiful land on high.*

*There's a beautiful land on high,
Where we never shall say goodbye;
When over the river we're happy forever,
In that beautiful land on high.*

The second brother was Private Walter Charles Darch of 16th Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment who was married and lived with his wife Annie at 58 Littabourne, Pilton. He joined up in May 1916 and shortly afterwards went to Egypt with his regiment before being transferred to France in about July 1918. He died of wounds received in action in Rouen, France, on 7th September 1918 at the age of 28 years having fought in both France and Flanders. Walter Charles Darch is buried in the St Sever Cemetery near Rouen.

A year on from his death, in September 1919, his wife and children in Littabourne and his parents and siblings in Pilton Street wrote in memory:

*Twelve months have passed since that sad day,
When one we loved was called away;
God took him home, it was his will.
When alone in our sorrow the bitter tears flow,
There comes a sweet dream of the not long ago;
Unknown to the world he stands by our side,
And whispers – “Dear one’s death cannot divide.”*

Thomas and Jane Darch had six sons all of whom served at some time - Albert, William, Walter Charles, John, Reginald, and James. Reginald and James had already been invalided out of the war after being wounded. John was still serving at the time and Albert had served for many years, both in the Royal Marines. A record of six sons serving was one of which the family might well have been proud.

Many thanks are due to Brian Barrow and his researchers for their phenomenal research on the men who died in the Great War, to the staff of the Barnstaple Local Studies Centre who researched, among others, the many Darches of North Devon who fought and died in the Great War and to the North Devon Journal which reported their deaths and stories.