

Sapper Harry Fry-Vicary 154113 284th Army Troop Company of the Royal Engineers

Harry Fry-Vicary was born in Pilton in 1897 and lived at 49A The Rock. His parents were William Henry Fry-Vicary and Adelaide Fry-Vicary (née Causey) and he attended The Bluecoat School in Barnstaple. Before he enlisted in the Royal Engineers in the summer of 1916 he was a cabinet maker at the Barnstaple Cabinet Works in Newport, Barnstaple.

As a Sapper in a Royal Engineers' Army Troop, a unit of around 200 men, he would have been involved in behind-the-lines bridging and water work as part of the Fifth Army under the command of General Sir Hubert Gough. Given his training as a cabinet maker, Sapper Fry-Vicary may well have been counted among the many trades required by the army in the field including blacksmith, bricklayers, carpenters, clerks, masons, painters, plumbers, surveyors, draughtsmen, wheelwrights, engine drivers and others.

He died on 24th March 1918 during what became known as the 'First Battle of the Somme, 1918' which lasted from 21st March to 5th April. On 21st March the German Army had launched a large-scale offensive against the Allied front on the Somme battlefield. This offensive was codenamed 'Operation Michael', and was the first of several attacks to be made against the Allies on the northern part of the Western Front in the spring of that year. Given his responsibilities, it is likely that Harry died during one of the actions defending the River Somme crossings.



In a letter to his parents, his commanding officer wrote "*I have to inform you that your son, Sapper H. Fry-Vicary, was killed in action on the 24th ult. The company was called up to hold part of the line at a critical moment, and your son died in the performance of his duty. Owing to the splendid behaviour of the men, who all did their part nobly, the enemy was kept in check. I should like to express my great regret at losing your son and my sympathy with you in your loss.*" Harry was awarded the British War Medal posthumously and his family was sent the Memorial Death Plaque of World War I (left).

A year later, Harry's parents wrote, "*In ever loving memory of our dear son, Sapper H Fry-Vicary, who was killed in action in France, March 24th 1918:*

*One lonely year has passed away,
Since the great sorrow fell.
But in our hearts we mourn the loss,
Of one we loved so dear.
Some day we hope to meet him,
Some day we know not when.
We shall clasp his hand in a better land,
And never part again."*



William Henry Fry-Vicary (died 1930) and Adelaide Fry-Vicary (died 1936) are buried in St Mary's Churchyard, Pilton and their gravestone also commemorates Harry Fry-Vicary. Harry is also commemorated on the war memorial plaque in St Mary's Church, Pilton, on the war memorial plaque in Christ Church in Bear Street, Barnstaple, and on the Roll of Honour of the Barnstaple

Cabinet Works (left). He is also remembered on Panel 10 – 13 of the Pozieres Memorial, 6 kilometres north-east of the town of Albert. It commemorates the 14,000 casualties of the United Kingdom and others who have no known grave and who fell during the Fifth Army retreat on the Somme between 21st March and 7th August 1918.

Many thanks are due to Marion Abbott, Harry's 1st Cousin once removed, to Brian Barrow, for his tremendous work in collecting information on all the men of Pilton who died in the Great War, and to the many regimental postings online relating to World War I, the Battles of the Somme, the Royal Engineers and others.

Martin Haddrill