

APLIN, Noah – killed in action 25 September 1915 – aged 26

Noah Aplin was born in Membury, probably at Quarry Field Farm. He was certainly there, in 1891, aged 2, where his father (also Noah) was farming.

The census shows his father (33) was also born in Membury, and his mother was Sarah who had been married before with a daughter Etta (8). There were 2 siblings, Robert (5), and Ellan (3).

Ten years (1901) later the family had moved to Goulds in Membury. The elder son, Robert (15), was no longer living with them, but there were now 5 children, including young Noah. He and his siblings attended all Membury school.

Three years before the start of war, they were still at Goulds and Noah (aged 22), his father and brother Robert worked as quarrymen at the lime works.

Noah answered the call to arms in August 1914 and walked down to Axminster with other Membury men, to volunteer into the 8th Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment. He had spent a year at Aldershot training camp. Then, with his comrades, he embarked for France, landing at Le Havre, at the end of July 1915 and 2 months later was to face his first battle. It was to be his last.

The Devonshires formed part of forces that were massed to try and break through the German lines, under General Haig at Loos-en-Goselle, in Northern France.

The attack started on 25 September 1915. For 3 days they had listened to the French and British bombardment as they moved up to the front. What they didn't know, was that there was a shortage of artillery ammunition to do the job. They were to find out later.

Before the 6.30 off, the 8th Battalion were waiting to 'go over the top'. The men were told to wear their gas masks. It was the first time masks had been used. They were very rudimentary, and the men couldn't see through fogged-up eyepieces, and could barely breathe with them on. Many soldiers took them off.

That morning, tons of chlorine gas was released for the first time by the British. In places it blew back on to their own lines. Many men were quickly engulfed in gas – eyes streaming and choking.

The whistle blew. Over the top and advancing over open fields, they were within range of German machine guns and artillery that had not been taken out by the bombardment. British losses were devastating, although by the end of the day they managed to break through and capture the town of Loos-en-Gohelle. The attack went on for another 3 days.

Thousands were killed. Amongst them, two Membury lads were killed that first day – 25th September 1915. One of them was Noah Aplin (aged 26).

He has no grave and is commemorated on the Loos Memorial to the Missing along with over 20,600 servicemen missing in action with no known grave. At that time his parents were living at Turn Moor, Membury.