

SALWAY, William – killed in action – 1 July 1916 aged 25

William Salway was the second son from the family of Samual and Selina Salway, to die in the war. They had both been born in Devon (Whitford and Axminster) and their eldest daughter Mabel had been born in Uplyme. But the family went up north, and William and Roland were born in Kimberworth, Rotherham, Yorkshire, where Samuel was working as a farm carter.

But when the 1911 census was taken, the family was back in Devon and, William, aged 19, was working as a cowman on Worthill, Wambrook and living with the farmers, John and Anna Whale and their children Emma and Samuel who were also working on the farm.

In August 1914, thousands of men were volunteering. All Britain's regiments were calling up their reservists and forming new battalions of what were to be called Kitchener's army.

The Devonshire Regiment formed the 8th Battalion on 19 August and sent out recruiting teams across Devon. William and his brother, Roland, together with other Membury men, walked down into Axminster to enlist. His army number was 10287.

These early recruits were sent for training to Rushmoor Camp, in Aldershot – which had very few facilities due to its rapid expansion with the high numbers of volunteers. William's younger brother, Roland, died there of pneumonia in late September.

But William went on with the others, to be shipped to France with the Devonshires. At some point, he was made a Corporal.

In 1916 the Somme Offensive was to an attack against the Germans, made by the French army, supported on the northern flank by the Fourth Army of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). Fought between 1 July and 1 November 1916, it turned out to be one of the largest battles of World War I, in which more than 1.5 million men on both sides were wounded or killed, making it one of the bloodiest battles in human history.

On the first day alone, the British suffered more than 57,000 casualties. William Salway was one of them. He was with his comrades in Mansell Copse above the village of Mametz. His commanding officer, Captain D.L. Martin, predicted that the machine gun below by the Mametz Church would be a fatal hazard, if it survived the British artillery pre-attack bombardment. It did. Both he, William Salway, and another 157 men were killed by that machine gun's uninterrupted fire.

Afterwards the 159 men were buried in a trench in the copse – it is known as the Devonshire Cemetery – one of the smallest – but the most moving WW1 cemeteries. The sign at the cemetery's gate states: "The Devonshires held this trench. They hold it still".

In 1916, his mother Selina was living at Waterloo Cottage, Membury.