

WILLIAM HENRY HARLEY

William was born on the 16th May 1872 in Eastney. His father William was in the RMA as a gunner. William together with his younger brother Frederick was baptised in the first RM church on the 29th August 875.

By 1881 William's father had left the RM and the family had moved to Stafford where his father worked as a Convict Warder at the local prison. Another son was born here named Alfred.

In 1889 at the age of 17 William joined the Royal Engineers having been working as a Painter in Civvy Street.

By 1891 William's family had moved back to Portsmouth and were living in one of the Courts off Nile St. Perhaps because of this when William left the Royal Engineers in October 1896 he applied to join the Portsmouth Borough Police. He was accepted and his service started on the 29th December 1896.

His personnel record shows that he was PC192, he was 5ft 10 ½ ins tall, had Brown hair and Hazel eyes.

At the outbreak of the 2nd Boer War in 1899 William re-joined the colours, I had thought this was a form of secondment but the Watch Committee minutes show most men who had previously been in the Army were recalled by their regiments. William left the force on the 23rd December 1899 but his record shows that on the 9th January 1900 he was promoted to 2nd class PC with effect from 29th December 1899.

Regrettably for William his unit, the 9th Field Company, ended up at Bloemfontein. It seems unlikely that he ever got to fight. Conditions in the town were appalling and an epidemic of Enteric fever (Typhoid) broke out. The Boer's controlled the clean water and over 1000 men died.

The RAMC had been telling people in England how well they were coping having learnt the lessons of Crimea but few believed them. The Times newspaper sent a correspondent out and his reports soon laid bare the true facts.

The hospital which was supposed to house 50 men in fact had 250 in it, Men were lying on waterproof sheets on the ground with only a thin

blanket over them. There were no beds, mattresses or pillows, hardly any medicines. No clean water to drink and no milk. There were no nurses and only 3 doctors to attend 350 patients. In some tents there was no room to step between the patients. When it rained the men were left lying in 3 inches deep of mud.

William died in this hospital, if you can call it that, on the 18th May 1900.

The Watch Committee minutes for 26th June 1900 show the following:-

“I regret to have to report the death of PC192 Harley which took place at Bloemfontein on the 21st May last of Enteric Fever. He was called upon to re-join his Regiment Field Company, Royal Engineers on the 23rd December 1899 and left the force for that purpose. For the greater period of his service he was in the Portsea Division. He was an intelligent and efficient Constable of exemplary character. He was unmarried”

William's medals were sent to his father on the 4th May 1903 after the war was ended.

William is commemorated on the war memorial at Bloemfontein.

On the 5th November 1904 William's youngest brother Arthur, who had been born while the family were in Stafford joined Portsmouth Borough Police. In 1921 he was promoted to Sergeant and retired on the 4th November 1930 on a pension of £195 13s 6d.