

WILLIAM JAMES SLADE

Lance Corporal

1st Bn. Princess Charlotte of Wales's (Royal Berkshire) Regiment

Service No: 37575

Died: 3 May 1917, Killed in Action, aged 25

William James Slade was born in Beenham on 14 March 1892 the son of James and Sarah Slade (nee Heath) and baptised at St. Mary's two days later on 16 March. His name does not appear on the war memorial. The 1891 census shows James aged 35 & Sarah 37 living in "Hall Place Rd.", Beenham. James is described as an agricultural labourer and both he and Sarah hailed from Brightwalton, having married in 1890, registered in Wantage.

By 1901 William James 9 is living with his parents in Frilsham. His father James, now 42 is described as a flour mill waggoner. We know something of William's early schooling from the National School Admission Registers & Log-books 1870-1914. He appears in the Register of Aldermaston Church of England School when he was admitted on 14 Oct 1903 before leaving on 16 March 1906 having reached school leaving age. That record also show he previously attended Cold Ash School.

Ten years later the 1911 census shows a William aged 19, described as a flour mill carter living with his father James 56, a flour mill waggoner and his mother Sarah 57 in Mill Cottage, Frouds Lane, Aldermaston. The census return shows that James and Sarah had been married for 21 years and that James was their only son.

William enlisted at Aldermaston but gave his residence as Wantage. His army number was originally 1493 as a Private in the 1st Bn. Princess Charlotte of Wales's (Royal Berkshire) Regiment but later he became Lance Corporal 37575 in the same Regiment. Nothing is known of his time in the Army or where he served. At the time



of his death, the 1st Bn. H.Q. was well behind the front line near Ecoivres in the Pas-de-Calais, East of Flers whilst the men continued holding the line near Arras having suffered devastating casualties on that and the preceding few days. Attacks had been made at Oppy Wood on the 29th April where LCpl J Welch won a VC. By the 1st May there were only enough men left to form two companies of 4 officers and 100 other ranks each of which was joined with the 23rd Royal Fusiliers to form a composite battalion.

On 3 May the British barrage opened at 0305, even though the troops were not yet quite ready and the left Company of the Royal Berks suffered a few casualties from their own barrage. The wire had been well cut so when the attack started the Battalion were able to make good progress against weak resistance. Between 0500 and 0530 the Berkshires began to make themselves more comfortable with men leaving the packed former German trench to seek refuge in shell holes to their rear. By this time all the available bombs had been used up and there were only three functioning Lewis guns. When the German counter attack came it could be repulsed

only by small arms and bayonet and the Royal Berks were soon driven out of the trench and all forced to seek refuge in the shell holes where they remained until relieved in the evening. They did manage to inflict heavy casualties on the Germans while most of the casualties they suffered were from machine guns and snipers in the wood and occurred as they were evacuating the German trench. The action had started with 8 officers and 210 other ranks in the two Berkshire Companies. They finished with 2 officers, both of whom were wounded and 94 other ranks. The official diary reports L/Cpl William James Slade was killed during this action.



William was awarded the Victory and British Medals and although referred to as a L/Cpl., other records describe him as a Private. He is commemorated on the Arras Memorial, Bay 7 and on an ornate gilded wooden plaque in St. Mary's Aldermaston, which was dedicated on 5 August 1920 to "the heroes from this parish who gave their lives for King and Country in the Great War".