

William Henry Pope BENNETT



- Born:** 16th July 1896, Padstow, Cornwall
- Occupation:** Apprentice warehouseman
- Enlisted:** Epsom: 17th October 1914 (Volunteer)
- Unit:** 13th Royal Sussex Regt. (Also 7th Bedfords)
- Rank:** Captain
- Awards:** Military Cross
- Death:** Killed in action, 30th March 1918
- Detail:** William died near the village of Hangard about 10 miles (16 km) south-east of Amiens, France as his battered battalion helped stem the tide of Germany's last-ditch offensive in March 1918. William went missing in an attack on the 30th. By June the enemy was halted.
- Age at death:** 22
- Military info:** When war broke out in August 1914 William was working as an apprentice with Biner Sharp, a large storage company in London. Prior to this he had attended two private schools, Merchant Taylors in London and Bucklands in Devon. At both he served in the Officer Training Corps. On 17th October 1914, William, aged 19, enlisted as a private in the 19th Royal Fusiliers (2nd Public Schools Battalion). The survival time for young officers at the front was a matter of weeks and the army was desperate to find likely candidates. Ex-public schoolboys were top of the list and on 27th January 1915 William gained a commission in the Royal Sussex Regiment. The following May he was posted to the Somme as an attached officer with the 7th Bedfordshires, part of 54th Brigade, 18th (Eastern) Division. On 1st July 1916 he attacked at Montauban on the first day of the Somme offensive and was wounded in the hand. The assault succeeded, a rare feat on a day that cost nearly 20,000 British lives. William was invalided home where shell shock was diagnosed. In April 1917 he was sent to the 13th Royal Sussex in France, part of 116th Brigade, 39th Division, and on 31st July he won the MC for gallantry at the Third Battle of Ypres, or Passchendaele. Eight months later he went missing.
- Grave/memorial:** William is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing on the Somme, at St Petroc's Church, Padstow and on the Padstow War Memorial.
- Family:** Father: Samuel Bennett, born St Merryn, Padstow, Cornwall in 1867. Drapery warehouseman. Mother: Nannie Jane Pope, born Padstow, Cornwall in 1868. The couple married in 1890 and had four children, two of whom died young.
- Additional info:** After the war his grieving father went several times to Ypres to search for his son's body, not knowing he had died 66 miles further south. For years his mother left the back door of her house unlocked in case her lost boy returned.



This information was researched by Peter Smith, who is currently writing a book about Padstow's part in the Great War. Anyone wishing to correct errors or supply additional information can write to him at 24 Mallard Drive, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 5PW. Also phone 01825 762226 or email smithpeter24@gmail.com

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