

Cheltenham & Gloucester Branch
of
The Western Front Association

Remembering one of Gloucestershire's Fallen



Serjeant William Cecil Wellicombe (3625)
5th Battalion Seaforth Highlanders

William Cecil Wellicombe (or Willie as he was known) was born in Marlow, Buckinghamshire in May 1890. He was educated there and in Suffolk and after studying at London University he undertook several teaching jobs before arriving at Katherine Lady Berkeley's Grammar School, Wotton-under-Edge, in September 1912, where he taught Latin, French, Games and Drill. He was of fine physique and a talented all-round sportsman.

Soon after the outbreak of war Willie enlisted in London and joined the 5th (Caithness and Sutherland) Battalion of the Seaforth Highlanders, a Territorial battalion. He was soon promoted through the ranks to Serjeant and landed with his battalion in France on 2 May 1915, being part of 152 Brigade, 51 (Highland) Division.

Over the next 18 months Willie saw a great deal of action along the Western Front, including battles at Festubert and Laventie. On 26 July 1916 the 5th Seaforths transferred to the Somme sector and went into the line for the first time at Authuille on 30 July. In November 1916 the battalion was facing the well fortified village of Beaumont Hamel. The 51st Division was ordered to try to take the village on 13 November 1916. On the day before Willie wrote his last letter home and in case of accidents he wished his family good bye and bid them, as he had always done, to 'keep smiling'.

The next morning was cold and foggy and at 5.45am a massive mine was blown under the German positions on Hawthorn Ridge. Willie led his men out of their trench and across no man's

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land. Progress was made in difficult visibility but Willie was seen to fall, shot by a sniper, near to the edge of the mine crater. He was one of the 94 other ranks of the 5th Seaforths killed or died of wounds that day.

Willie's body was recovered and buried in Maily Wood Cemetery behind the lines at the village of Maily-Maillet. He was aged 26.

The Governors of Katherine Lady Berkeley's Grammar School placed on record *'their*

appreciation of the good works he had done in the school and the noble example he had set'. In the 1920s the school named a House in his honour, which remains the case to this day.

Willie's brother, Private Edwin Cyril Wellicombe, had been killed in action a few months earlier, with the 24th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers and lies in Delville Wood Cemetery.



Maily Wood Cemetery