

William James Collyer
1892 – 1917: age at death 25
Student at the Society of the Sacred Mission

William James Collyer was the third child of Thomas and Kate Collyer. William was born on 10 April 1892. He had a brother Samuel and sister Mabel, both older than him. When his parents married his father was aged about 42 and already a 'Watchmaker Master' (she was about 30). He died in 1899 leaving Kate a widow with three children.

Before her marriage to Thomas, Kate worked for Robert Smith, a wealthy East India Merchant as a nurse for his many children. It may be because of this that she received an annuity from The Mercer's Company of £52 pa. It was the Mercer's Company that 'presented' William to Christ's Hospital, Sussex – that is, the Company paid his school fees. He was a pupil there from 1902 until his 'discharge' in 1908, when he moved to Brixton, London.

The connection to the East India Company continued. At the time of the 1911 census. William was working as a Mercantile Clerk for a Tea Merchant and his brother Samuel was an Accountant with an 'India Merchant'. Samuel, as the oldest son is listed as Head of the Household.

William joined the Society in 1913 but was a student in Kelham for only a year before he enlisted in September 1914. He was later commissioned as a second lieutenant in the 13th Bn of the Royal Sussex Regiment. The regimental chaplain described him as 'a rock of support in these stirring days' while his major wrote that he was 'beloved by his men, admired by his brother officers and I can sincerely add, a most efficient officer in every way'.



William is mentioned in *Undertones of War* by Edmund Blunden, a noted WW1 poet and fellow pupil from Christ's Hospital. It is acknowledged as one of the leading books written by a serving participant. Chapter XIX has several references to Collyer and the other Old Blues who met for 'The Feast of Five' in St Omer in the Spring of 1917.

Photo: "The Feast of Five: From Edmund Blunden's Minute Book.," The Edmund Blunden Literary Estate via *First World War Poetry Digital Archive*,

<http://ww1lit.nsms.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/item/9083> .

In a letter to the School magazine, Blunden described Collyer and another 'Old Blue' as thorough, especially in their preparation for assembly and assault

no detail of reconnaissance or equipment, or positions, or explaining orders to their men, was too much trouble to them ... Collyer was cheerful at all times and gifted with odd humour which made him a most agreeable companion

William died on the 31 July 1917, possibly from friendly fire. His body was never found, and he is commemorated on the Menin Gate, Panel 20. He was 23.

FindMyPast <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/>

Nottinghamshire Great War Roll of Honour: <http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/rollofhonour/>

Commonwealth War Graves Commission:
<http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/rollofhonour/People/Details/678>

Forces War Records website: <https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk/>

Society of the Sacred Mission Quarterly Newsletter, Borthwick Institute.
<https://www.york.ac.uk/borthwick/>