

## **Evelyn Walter COOLEY**

**Born:** 1887, Parkhurst

**Parents:** George Cooley and Vashti Wearne

**Last known address:** Horsebridge Hill, Newport

**Last known occupation:** Prison Warder (Camp Hill)

**Service number:** 23035

**Regiment:** 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Hampshire Regiment

### **Service history summary:**

- enlisted: not known
- promoted: Lance Corporal (date unknown)
- decorations: British War Medal and Victory Medal,

**Died:** 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1916

**Age:** 29

**Buried:** [Cambrin Churchyard Extension](#)

**Family:** Evelyn Walter Cooley was the youngest child of George Cooley and Vashti Wearne, who were married in St John's Church, Oakfield, Ryde in 1869. Evelyn was born on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1887. George was a prison warder who died in 1898 at the age of 53. Vashti died in 1913 and is buried in Northwood Cemetery. Both Evelyn and his brother, Edgar John, are commemorated on her gravestone (right) although Edgar does not appear on the Northwood/Gurnard memorial. He was a Lance Corporal in the West Yorkshire Regiment and was killed in action on November 17<sup>th</sup> 1917, probably at the Battle of Passchendaele, and is listed on the Tyne Cot Memorial. Of the other children, only Vashti Louise married on the Island, when she wed Edward Burrige, a prison warder, in 1896 at St John the Baptist, Northwood. They had three children and subsequently moved to Portsmouth before 1911. Vashti Louise died in Portsmouth in 1967.



Picture courtesy of Mr Barry Sowerby

**Brothers:** George Edward (1870), William Charles (1874), Henry James (1876), Frank Victor (1880) and Edgar John (1884)

**Sister:** Vashti Louise (1872)

**Northwood/Gurnard connection:** before becoming a prison warder, George Cooley was a mason and lived in Ryde, where both he and Vashti were born. The first three children were also born there but the family moved to Parkhurst around 1875, presumably when he joined the Prison Service. The family lived in married quarters at the prison until George died and the four younger children were born there. Vashti moved her family to Horsebridge Hill and took in lodgers, presumably to make ends meet. They lived a few doors away from the family of William Trobridge *qv*. In 1911

Evelyn was a carpenter but he then joined the Prison Service as warder at Camp Hill, presumably when it opened in 1912.

**War record:** it is not known when Evelyn joined up as his service record has not survived. However, the 1<sup>st</sup> battalions of both the Dorset and the Hampshire Regiments were sent to the Western Front in August 1914 and remained there until the end of the War. Both regiments fought in many of the major battles, including the Marne, Aisne and Messines in 1914, the second Battle of Ypres in 1915 and they were there for the Christmas Truce of 1914. In July 1916 both regiments fought the Battle of Albert, which was the last action that Evelyn took part in before his death in August, when he was killed by a shell.

*Isle of Wight County Press*, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1916

Lce.-Corpl. E. Cooley, Dorset [*sic*] Regiment, who has been killed in action, was formerly a warder at Camp Hill Prison. He was the son of the late George Cooley, of Horsebridge-hill, a former officer of H.M. Convict, Prison, and a member of the Carisbrooke Church choir, which has thus lost its third bass singer ... Lce.-Crpl. Renshaw, a comrade of the deceased, who was near him in the trenches, writing home to Mr. A. Peek, of The Britannia, Hunny-hill, states that deceased was killed by a shell early on the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> ult., and adds: "His loss will be greatly felt by all the Island boys, as he was of a genial disposition and kindly nature, had the making of an excellent soldier, and was exceptionally popular with all the boys of his company. His death was almost instantaneous. The remainder of the Island boys have so far managed to dodge Fritz's free gifts and are in excellent health."

Evelyn is commemorated on the Camp Hill war memorial as well as those of Northwood and also St Cuthbert's Church in Copnor, Portsmouth, which was presumably where his sister lived. His original grave marker (a small metal tag attached to each grave before a headstone was erected) is in St Wilfred's Church, Portsmouth although he has no known connection with that parish.