

## Bertram Gilbert BERRY



- Born:** 1899, Padstow, Cornwall
- Occupation:** Clerk
- Enlisted:** Bodmin: 8th February 1917 (Conscripted)
- Unit:** 6th Dorsetshire Regt.
- Rank/number:** Lance Corporal: No.20706
- Death:** Died of wounds, 26th June 1918
- Detail:** Bertram, called Gib by his friends or ‘The Boy’ by his family, was fatally wounded during a night raid at Beaumont Hamel on the Somme on the 8th June 1918. The 6th Dorsets attacked following a British barrage and he was struck in the head by shrapnel. His commanding officer was twice wounded carrying him back, but Gib died in a Rouen hospital 18 days later.
- Age at death:** 18
- Military info:** Gib was 14 when war broke out and a pupil at Bodmin County School. The following year he got a job as a clerk at Henwood & Sons, a wholesaler in Padstow. After the early rush to enlist recruitment slowed and in January 1916 conscription was brought in. The following February Gib, now 17, was called up and posted to the 53rd Young Soldiers Battalion at Rollestone Camp, Wilts. On 21st March 1918 the Germans launched a huge offensive in France. Men were urgently needed and in April the maximum age of recruitment was increased to 50 and the minimum age for soldiers to serve overseas was reduced from 19 years to 18 years and 6 months, provided the man had at least six months training. Gib fell into this category and on 3rd April 1918 he arrived in France and was posted to the 6th Dorsets, part of 50th Brigade, 17th (Northern) Division. In June the 50th Brigade was ordered to launch a night attack at Beaumont Hamel, scene of slaughter on the first day of the Somme in 1916. The 6th Dorsets spent days rehearsing the raid, which also involved troops of 7<sup>th</sup> East Yorks. The attack was launched at 10pm on 8th June, achieving total surprise. Many Germans died at a cost to the Dorsets of 148 casualties. Gib was hit in the head by shrapnel, probably fired by his own guns. He died on 26th June, his parents at his bedside.
- Grave/memorial:** Gib is buried St Sever Cemetery Extension in Rouen, and he is commemorated at St Petroc’s Church in Padstow and on the Padstow War Memorial.
- Family info:** Father: William Berry, born Padstow, Cornwall in 1868. Cabinet maker. Mother: Maud Helbren, born Padstow, Cornwall in 1870. The couple married in 1895 and had six children, two of whom died. Brother: War veteran Claude Berry became a noted journalist, author and poet. A lover of all things Cornish.
- Additional info:** Gilbert hoped to wed Padstow sweetheart Olive Bate after the war. He sent more than 100 loving letters, the last penned the day before ‘going over the top.’



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