

Trooper Douglas Ernest Vincent CHISHOLM

Service Number 323220
North Somerset Yeomanry
Died on 19 April 1940, aged 23

Douglas has the distinction of being the City's first soldier to die on active service in this war. He was born in Wells, where his family ran a cycle shop on High Street. He went to the Cathedral School, was a cathedral chorister, and was the children's organist at St Cuthbert's. In January 1940 he went with the North Somerset Yeomanry to Palestine where he died of meningitis.



The memorial to Douglas in St Cuthbert's Church
Photograph by Mark Newton © WMR-24689

Douglas was born in Wells in late 1916 to Ernest William Chisholm and Lily née Vincent. He had six sisters and lived above the shop at 70, High Street. His father ran a bicycle shop and was a member of the Wells Lodge of Druids. On 26 April 1940, the *Wells Journal* reported that:

Trooper Douglas Chisholm, of the North Somerset Yeomanry, has died in military hospital while serving overseas ...

Trooper Chisholm, who was an only son, was 23 years of age. It was known some weeks ago that he had been seriously ill, but it was hoped that he was, by this time, well on the road to recovery. The news of his death on Friday was received with sorrow by a host of friends in the City.

Douglas was an old Cathedral School boy and sang as a chorister in Wells Cathedral choir. On leaving school he was employed by Messrs. Harris and Harris, solicitors, of Wells, and later by Mr. D. Woodhams [Stock Broker, 5 Market Place]. After the death of his father [in 1938] he assisted his mother in the High-street business.

He was a member of the Mendip Players and also of Toc H. and assisted at the Public Library. Of a happy disposition he enjoyed the esteem and respect of a wide circle of friends.

A few other facts about Douglas' life in Wells can be added. He was at the Cathedral School from September 1929 until July 1932, and before that he attended Oakleigh School on Chamberlain Street. At various times he was a member of the St Cuthbert's Sunday School, the 5th Wells Rovers (Scouts), the Operatic Society's chorus and the Swimming Club. Douglas acted as the organist for the children's services at St Cuthbert's Church and was generally involved in church life.

It seems likely that Douglas had enlisted into the yeomanry before the war started, perhaps in April 1939 when it was announced that by joining the territorial forces the recruit would not be liable for conscription later on. Douglas would then have been called up for six months' training.

In January 1940, the North Somerset Yeomanry, both men and horses, sailed from Southampton to Cherbourg in France, and from there went by train to Marseilles. From Marseilles they went by boat to Haifa, in what was then Palestine, and arrived there at the end of January. In Palestine the regiment served as a garrison force to relieve Regular units. On 20 February, Douglas was reported to be 'dangerously ill' with meningitis in a Military Hospital in Haifa, and two months later he died.

Douglas is buried in Israel, at the Ramleh War Cemetery in grave D.21. He is also remembered on the rolls of honour at Wells Cathedral School, Wells Town Hall, Wells Cemetery, and on a tablet in St Cuthbert's Church on the north wall near the organ.

We would like to thank George Bunting (Chairman, The Wellensian Association) for his help with this article.