

# Willie (William) Latham

## (1890 – *unknown*)

Willie Latham was born in Eastburn. His father was farm manager at Knott Farm.

The family moved to Hellifield House in High Farnhill and Willie became an architect's clerk. He was also a talented musician – studying for more than a year in Berlin.

Serving in the Navy during WW1 war, Willie's ship took part in the Battle of Jutland.

In 1916 Willie married and, two years later, he and his wife had twin boys who died shortly after their birth. He was finally discharged from the Navy in 1919 and although records show that the Lathams probably left the village between 1919 and 1920 nothing certain is known of their destination or of their future lives – although Willie may have lived in London for a time.



### Pre-war life

Willie Latham was born, in Eastburn, on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1890; the only son of Thomas Latham and his wife Annie (nee Wrathall). His birth was registered early the following year, in Keighley.

The 1891 census recorded the family living at Knot Farm (more likely Knott Farm) Eastburn, where Thomas was the "Farm Bailiff", or manager.

The family consisted of Thomas and Annie and three young children:

- Nellie (actually Elizabeth Ellen), aged seven
- Ida, aged five
- Willie, aged four months

Also living with them at this time was Richard Latham, Thomas's nephew, aged nine.

The family do not appear to have moved to Farnhill until 1910, in time for inclusion on the 1911 electoral roll, which recorded the family living at Hellifield House (77 Main Street).

The 1911 census, taken when Willie was 20 years old, gives his occupation as "Architect's Clerk". His father is listed as a "Dairy Farmer".

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.									
Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.									
The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, as in connection with Old Age Pension than the preparation of Statistical Tables.									
NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family	AGE (last birthday) and SEX	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE					PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of Persons aged ten years and upwards	BIRTHPLACE of every person
1 Thomas Latham	Head	51	married					Little Farming	Grassington Yorkshire
2 Annie Latham	Wife	47	married	26	5	3	2	at home	Grassington Yorkshire
3 Eda Latham	Daughter	25	single					Carles & Brewster, Bookbinders	Grassington Yorkshire
4 Willie Latham	Son	20	single					Architects Clerk	Grassington Yorkshire
5 Eda Whittaker	Sister	19	single					Worker	West Harton Yorkshire

Extract from the 1911 census return for Hellifield House, Farnhill  
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**Note:** The “Particulars of Marriage” section records that Thomas and Annie had been married for 26 years and had had five children. Three of these were living at the time of the census and two children born to the couple had died.

It is likely that it was around this time that Willie became a member of Kildwick and Farnhill Institute. He also joined Crosshills Orchestra, as a violinist, rising to become its leader.

Willie must have a talented musician as he appears to have spent over a year, before WW1, studying in Berlin.

## WW1 service

Willie Latham was one of a handful of the Farnhill WW1 Volunteers who served in the Navy during WW1. He joined up on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1915, for the “Period of hostilities”. He was 5’ 10” inches tall, with light brown hair and blue eyes.

<b>M</b> 11685		Dev		<b>M</b> 11685	
Name in full	willie Latham	Date of Birth	14/3/15	12 November 1895	
	PIC No 368353	Place of Birth	Grassington Yorkshire	Occupation	Bookbinder
Date and Period of Engagements	Age	Height	Chest	Hair	Eyes
2 February 1915. Period of hostilities	20	5' 10"	37 1/2	Brown	Blue
					Complexion
					Speck
					Wounds, Scars, or Marks

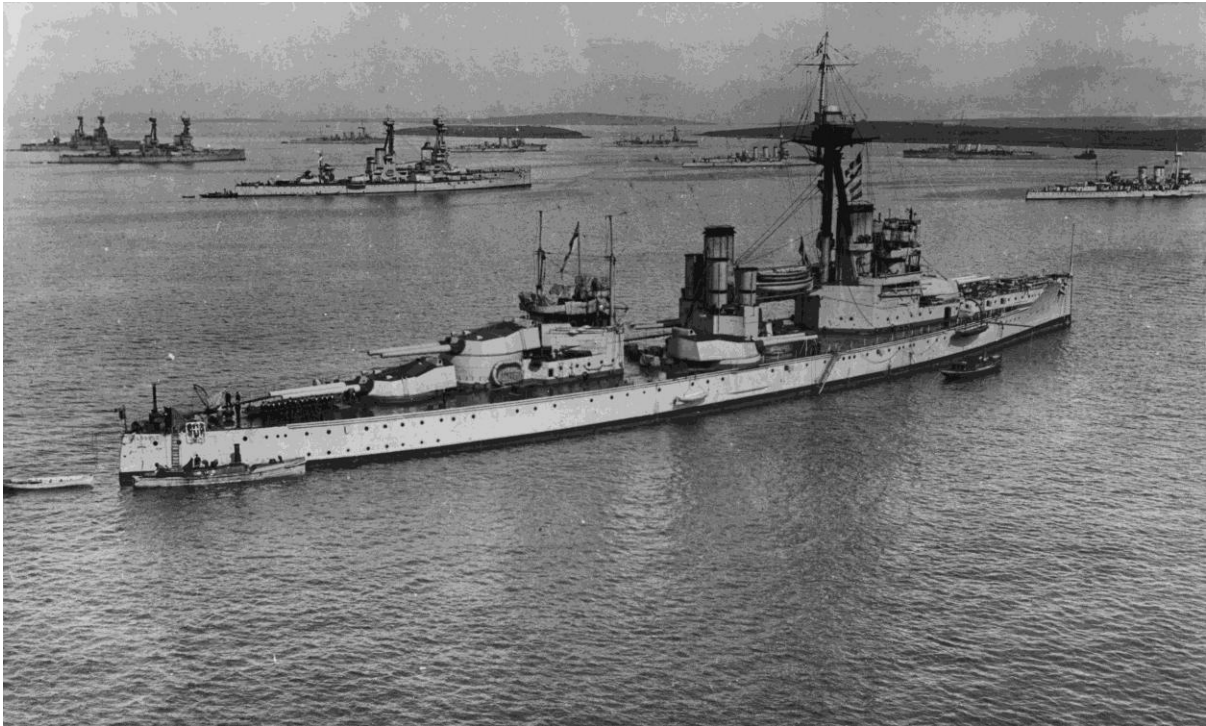
Extract from Willie Latham’s WW1 naval service record – showing his personal details  
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After three months training, attached to the naval shore station Vivid I in Portsmouth, Willie Latham was assigned to one of the navy’s most prestigious vessels. This was the dreadnought battleship HMS Colossus, stationed with the British Grand Fleet in Scapa Flow, Orkney.

Willie Latham was one of the ship's support staff. Initially a Steward's Assistant, he rose to become a Leading Victualler's Assistant by the end of his service period.

Ship, &c, served in.	List.	No.	Rating.	Period of Service.		If Discharged, whither and for what cause	Rating.	Su
				From	To			
Vivid I	18DII	744	S.A.	7 Feb 15	9 May 15		Coder	2
Colossus	5DII	13	"	10 May 15				
"	"	"	"	Vict Ant 28 Feb 18				
"	"	"	"	Ldg. V.A.	12 March 17	14 Feb 18		
Vivid I	18DII	539	"	14 Feb 18	11 April 19	Shore on board 1. 2		
"	5DII	70	"					

Extract from Willie Latham’s WW1 naval service record – showing his service with Vivid I and Colossus  
Used under licence from the National Archive



HMS Colossus at anchor in Scapa Flow with other ships of the Grand Fleet, 1916  
Photograph from [Wikimedia Commons](#) (public domain)

On 31 May 1916, Colossus, under the command of Captain Dudley Pound, took part in the Battle of Jutland. The vessel did not play a major part in the engagement but sustained slight damage, which resulted in injuries to seven men. This was the only hit sustained by any of the dreadnoughts from the main body of the Grand Fleet.

In his subsequent report to the Admiralty, Pound wrote:

*Generally speaking, the action from the point of view of this ship was a most tantalising one, as the presence of the enemy was obvious from the flashes of his guns, but only for a short period did an opportunity occur of getting into action with any of the enemy's capital ships.*

*The conduct of the Officers and Men was excellent, and such as one had always hoped it would be.*

From [www.dreadnoughtproject.org](http://www.dreadnoughtproject.org)

The action of Colossus at Jutland was witnessed by a young naval officer serving on the destroyer HMS Collingwood:

*As far as one could see only 2 German Battle Squadrons and all their Battle Cruisers were out. "Colossus" leading the 6th division with the "Collingwood" next astern was nearest the enemy. The whole Fleet deployed at 5:00 and opened out. We opened fire at 5:37 on some German light cruisers. The Collingwood's second salvo hit one of them which set her on fire.*

*From the diary of Prince Albert (later King George VI), used as part of Orkney Museum's 2016 summer exhibition –  
"The Battle of Jutland, Scapa Flow and the War at Sea"*

After the battle, Willie Latham sent a message home to his parents. This was published in the West Yorkshire Pioneer a fortnight before news of the battle itself was released to the press. It must have seemed rather incongruous in the circumstances.

**FARNHILL.**  
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Latham have received  
a message from their son, Petty Officer Wm.  
Latham, of the "Colossus," stating that he  
is safe and well.

From West Yorkshire Pioneer, 9/6/1916.  
Used by kind permission of Craven Herald

A few weeks later, on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1916, while home on leave, Willie Latham married Elsie Greenwood in a ceremony at St. Andrew's, Kildwick.



Used by kind permission of Keighley News

Elsie, who was a year younger than Willie, worked in one of the local cotton mills and was also a Sunday school teacher at St. Andrew's.

Taking charge of a class seems to have been something that Elsie had done even whilst at school. Her name appears in that connection at least three times in the Kildwick school headmaster's log for 1904 – when she would have been aged 13. The last of these perhaps revealing some regret that her assistance was no longer available.

*Elsie Greenwood assisted with the Infants this afternoon as Miss Walter has charge of the needlework until a permanent teacher is appointed to the lower classes.*

*E. Greenwood (St.VI) assisted with the Infants this afternoon.*

*E. Greenwood having left the school, some of the St.V girls assist with the Infants on Thursday & Friday afternoons.*

Extracts from the Kildwick school log book (9/9/1904, 21/10/1904, and 8/12/1904)  
Reproduced by kind permission of Kildwick school



After the honeymoon Willie returned to his ship but, from 18<sup>th</sup> April 1918, was given extended shore leave whilst still attached to the Vivid I shore station, in Portsmouth.

He was finally discharged from the Navy on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1919.

## Post-war life

On the 28<sup>th</sup> August 1918, Elsie gave birth to twin boys – Thomas Stanley and William – at her parents' home, 46 Ryeland Street, Crosshills. They were premature, and both died on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

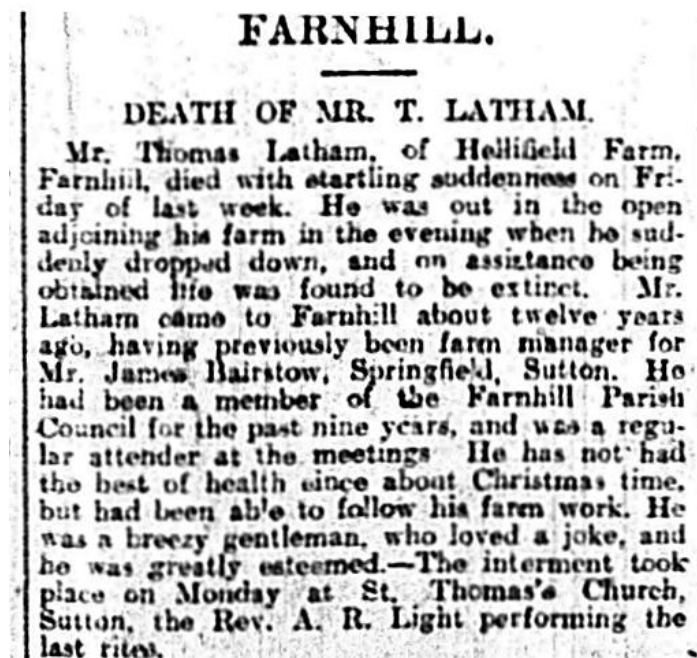
On the 29<sup>th</sup> March 1919 Tom Appleby, the headmaster of Kildwick school, organised an evening of entertainments for 200 returning soldiers and their friends. Amongst the performers were Mrs. William Latham and Mr. A. Greenwood – Elsie and her brother Arthur.

This is the last known reference to either Willie or Elsie Latham in Farnhill. Sometime after this they must have left the village, as Willie does not appear on the electoral roll for 1920 which was compiled towards the end of 1919.

Subsequent efforts by the project have failed to locate them, and details of the rest of their lives are uncertain (but see later).

## Postscript

Tom Latham, Willie's father died, suddenly at home, on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1922.



Keighley News 20/5/1922

By kind permission of Keighley News

He was aged either 61 or 62.

Probate was granted to “Annie Latham, widow, and Willie Latham, a musician”.

Annie appears to have moved from Hellifield House on the death of her husband, but remained in the village – living first at 3 Staincliffe Street (small dwellings behind Main Street, running down from the junction with Grange Road: now forming the basements of the houses on Main Street); then at 43 Main Street. She died in 1936, aged 71 or 72.

Tom and Annie were buried together at St. Thomas’ Church, Sutton-in-Craven.



The fallen and damaged gravestone of Thomas and Annie Latham

Both of Willie’s sisters married and at least one of them had children. There may be descendants living in the Rochdale area.

## **Willie Latham in the 1930s ?**

A man called Willie Latham, a widower, married Gladys Emily King in the Register Office of East Ham, east London, on the 30<sup>th</sup> July 1938. Willie gave his age as 44, Gladys gave hers as 33, and they both gave their address as 24 Ratcliff Road, Forest Gate. They were both civil servants: he was working in the Ministry of Labour; she was a telephonist in the Department of Trade. Critically, for connecting this man to the Farnhill WW1 Volunteer of the same name, he gave his father’s details as Thomas Latham (deceased), a farmer.

The couple appear at the same address on the 1939 Register, taken at the start of WW2 to enable the issuing of ration books. This recorded Willie's date of birth as 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1892. In addition to being a civil servant, he was also an ARP Warden attached to the Fire Service.

This Willie Latham was clearly "flexible" about his age. A man aged 44 in 1938, as per the marriage certificate, would have been born in 1894, not 1892, as recorded on the 1939 Register. If we go further and suggest that he actually understated his age by four years on his marriage certificate and by two years on the 1939 Register, then we have an exact match with the date of birth of the Farnhill WW1 Volunteer, who was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1890.

If this is the same man, and Willie remarried as a widower on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1938, Elsie Latham, his first wife must have died before then. No record of her death has been found.



## William (Willie) Latham – a life in summary

**Born:** 22/11/1890, Eastburn

**Died:** *unknown*

### Parents

**Father:** Thomas; b. 1860, Grassington; d. 12/5/1922, Farnhill

**Mother:** Annie (nee Wrathall); b. 1864, Steeton; d. 1936, Skipton (Registration district)

**Married:** 16/4/1883, St. Stephen's, Steeton

### Siblings

Elizabeth Ellen; b. 1884, Sutton Mill;

m. Edwin Harrison Whitaker, 1907, Keighley (Registration district); d. March 1964

Ida; b. 15/9/1885, Sutton Mill; m. Arthur H. Stephens, 1920, Sutton;

d. 1975, Staincliffe (Registration district)

plus two others who died prior to the 1911 census

### WW1 service

**Service period:** 2/2/1915 to 11/4/1919

**Service no:** M11685

**Rank:** SSA (2/2/15 to 27/2/18); VA (28/2/1918 to 11/3/18); LVA (12/3/18 to 11/4/19)

**Vessel:** Vivid I (2/2/1915 to 9/5/1915; 18/4/1918 to 11/4/1919)  
HMS Colossus (10/5/1915 to 17/4/1918)

**Medals:** 1915 Star, Victory Medal, British War Medal

**Home address:** Hellifield House, 77 Main Street

### Marriage

**Wife:** Elsie Greenwood; b. 20/8/1891, Farnhill; d. *unknown*

**Date:** 26/7/1916, Kildwick

A possible second marriage to Gladys Emily King, on 30/7/1938 at East Ham Register Office.

### Children

Thomas Stanley; b. 28/8/1918, Crosshills; d. 30/8/1918, Crosshills

William; b. 28/8/1918, Crosshills; d. 30/8/1918, Crosshills

They were twins.

