

## SAPPER ALFRED CHARLES WILKINSON

17756, G Company, Royal Engineers

Died aged 33 on 30 March 1918

Buried with honour in *Fort Pitt Military Cemetery, Kent*, 1487

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey and in Forthampton



*Fort Pitt Military Cemetery, Kent*



*1914-15 Star Medal*



*Royal Engineers*

**ALFRED CHARLES WILKINSON** was born in 1885, the eldest son but second child of Samuel Wilkinson, a bricklayer, and Annie (formerly Hawkins). Samuel was born in 1853 in either Deerhurst or Tewkesbury and married in 1881. Alfred was educated at Trinity and Council Schools; in the 1901 Census he was a mason's labourer and the family were living in Oldbury Road. In 1911 Samuel was a widower, working for the Yorke Estate in Forthampton.

In 1904 Alfred joined the Army and in the 1911 Census he is a bricklayer/Sapper in the 23rd Field Company of the Royal Engineers, based at Stanhope Lines, Aldershot. He was presumably nearing the end of his seven years' service as he worked for Coutts & Howell, the Tewkesbury building firm, before leaving to work for the Yorke family at Forthampton.

Formed in 1787, the Royal Engineers had taken on a significant role by 1914, becoming eventually responsible for, amongst other things, tunnelling, forestry, quarrying, chemical warfare (gas), camouflage, postal service and even the Army Pigeon Service.

As a reservist, Alfred joined up again in 1914, this time in the 59th Field Company, Royal Engineers, 5th Division, which was sent to France with the original British Expeditionary Force. His date of posting to France, 16 August 1914, indicates that he would certainly have been involved in the *Battle of Mons* (23-26 August). The Royal Engineers Field Companies were engaged in demolishing road and railway bridges, which helped make the retreat orderly and successful. The *Tewkesbury*

*Register* suggests that Alfred was an acting Corporal in 1916. Perhaps when on leave in that year he married Dorothy Matty, born in 1894, the daughter of Mrs. Hodges of Jeynes Row.

**Sapper Alfred Charles Wilkinson** was awarded the '1914-15 Star' medal and he was wounded three times during his service. At the time of his death he was based at a Royal Engineers Depot in Chatham, Kent, probably training new recruits; his history of wounds most likely took him out of active service. On 30 March 1918 he tragically lost his life when he was in charge of horses which bolted near the depot. He is buried at *Fort Pitt Military Cemetery*, Rochester, Kent, which contains 265 First World War graves.

Alfred's brother, **Sapper Frank William Wilkinson** [†], also served in the Engineers and lost his life three weeks later. The names of both brothers were added to the *Abbey Memorial* after the main work was finished. His brother-in-law, **Private Albert George Hodges** [†] of the Machine Gun Corps, died in 1918 at Basra in modern Iraq.

At the time of Alfred's death Dorothy was pregnant; the child was born in the summer of 1918 and was named Alfred after his late father. In 1919 she re-married to Percy Booth and was living at Sweets Court, Smith's Lane, High Street. Was this the same Percy Booth who was charged with being absent without leave from the 3rd Ox & Bucks Light Infantry? Percy's brother, F. H. Booth, died in 1931; he had been gassed whilst serving with the 1/5th Gloucestershire Regiment.