

SAPPER FRANK WILLIAM WILKINSON

145234, 130th Field Company, Royal Engineers

Died aged 28 on 16 April 1918

Remembered with honour in *Etaples Military Cemetery, France*; XXIX D 10

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross, in the Abbey, on the Grammar School Memorial and in Forthampton



Etaples Military Cemetery, Boulogne



F.W. Wilkinson 1911/12



Royal Engineers

FRANK WILLIAM WILKINSON was born in Tewkesbury in 1891, the youngest of five children of Samuel Wilkinson, a Bricklayer, and Annie (formerly Hawkins). In 1901 the family were living in Oldbury Road. On the 1911 Census, Frank was described as a Bricklayer's Labourer, living and working with his widowed father for the Yorke Estate in Forthampton. The photo shows him as 'Cricketing Estate Mason 1911/12, Forthampton Legion Club'. He married Maud Jane Jeffs, a native of Cheltenham, in Tewkesbury on 10 August 1916.

With so many deaths being reported in 1918, Frank's obituary was not published and little is known, therefore, about his early life. He may have followed his elder brother to Trinity and the Council Schools. However, unlike Alfred, he is not commemorated as a volunteer in Tewkesbury and does not feature in the Roll of Honour in the *Tewkesbury Register*. His army service record does confirm that he enlisted in Tewkesbury as a volunteer in the Royal Engineers on 10 December 1915, evidently as part of the 'Derby Scheme'. This scheme encouraged the recruitment of volunteers who would be called up only when necessary. Frank was eventually mobilised on 9 February 1916, sent to a Base Depot in France on 22 August 1916, and finally posted on 18 October 1917 to the 130th Field Company, Royal Engineers, 25th Division. This division had been established in September 1914 as part of Kitchener's New Army and crossed to France in September 1915.

In April 1918 the Division was in Belgium, in the Ploegsteert, south of Ypres. This area had been targeted by the Germans as part of *Opera-*

tion Georgette (named by the British as the *Battles of the Lys* (7-29 April 1918)), the second of four phases of the campaign known as the German Spring Offensive (21 March-18 July). It achieved considerable tactical success, but failed in its strategic objectives.

Frank was fatally wounded, probably just before 16 April 1918, during the *Battle of Bailleul* (13-15 April 1918), one of the phases of the *Battles of the Lys*. On 13 April, units of the Division came under bombardment from 9.30am onwards and were attacked by infantry two hours later; they mounted a staunch defence, fighting continuing until the town of Bailleul itself fell to the Germans. The Division was by now thoroughly exhausted by continuous fighting for five days, and fragmented by heavy losses. Frank would have been evacuated from the front line along a well-established chain of medical units until he reached the French coast and the massive Etaples training camp which incorporated 16 hospitals and a convalescent depot.

Sapper Frank William Wilkinson died of his wounds, identified as 'gun shot wounds to the thigh', on 16 April 1918 in the 1st Canadian General Hospital and he is buried in *Etaples Military Cemetery*. His brother, **Sapper Alfred Charles Wilkinson** [†], also served in the Engineers and lost his life in March 1918. The names of both brothers were added to the *Abbey Memorial* after the main work was finished.

Although Frank's wife, Maud, was living near to family in Smethwick at the time he died, she returned eventually to Tewkesbury and married Raymond J. Dobbins in 1923. They went on to have three, possibly, five children.