

# William Griffiths

Private

48524

**6<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion, Lancashire Fusiliers**



William Griffiths biography demonstrates the tragedy that war can inflict upon families. His story begins in Kington toward the end of 1899 when William is born, the last of five children to Frank and Elizabeth Griffiths. Frank was a shoemaker from Lydbury in North Shropshire who lived and worked in Kington and had made it his home. In the 1891 census Frank was living at 24 Crooked Well down by the Back Brook in Kington. The only other person in the house was Elizabeth Price who is recorded as Frank's servant and housekeeper. In 1892 this intimate relationship resulted in the birth of a baby girl called Kate. The following year, Frank and Elizabeth were married and shortly after a second daughter Mary was born. Gertrude, their third daughter, arrived in 1896. In 1898 Frank junior was to be their first son. Frank also served during the war and sadly lost his life on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1918 while fighting with the Gloucestershire Regiment near Langemark on the Western Front. Frank's biography can also be found on the Kington Remembers website. All would seem to have been going well for the Griffiths family however, as the family grew these happy events were soon to be thrown into chaos when the dichotomy of life and death afflicted the family at the start of the new century.

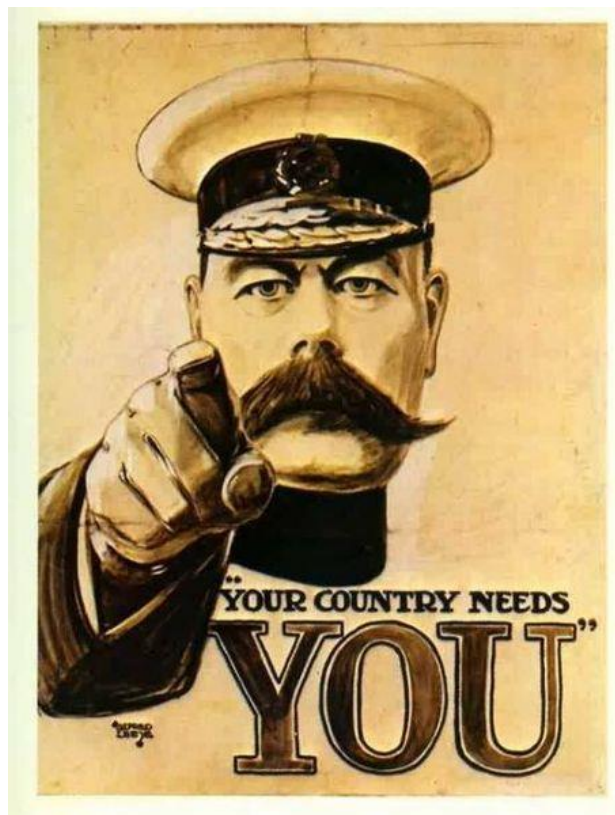
As mentioned earlier William was born in late 1899, but what should have been a happy time was overshadowed by the death of Frank senior in early 1900, the

circumstances of his demise are unknown. Today we can only speculate on the emotional turmoil Elizabeth must have been going through and hope Williams birth acted as a salve for the tragic loss of her husband, Frank. At the age of forty-one, with a very young family of five, she had lost her beloved husband and the breadwinner of her family. Life can be so cruel, and the heartbreak of tragedy was to haunt her later during the war.

Although the loss of Frank must have affected the Griffiths family greatly life for continued and in the 1901 Kington census we find Elizabeth, with her five children, living at 5 Oxford Terrace and employed as a charwoman. Ten years later the family had thinned down somewhat and only Elizabeth and the two boys were living together at 27 Bridge Street. The 1911 census reveals that Elizabeth was still employed as a charlady and the two boys were attending Kington Boys School on Gravel Hill. When old enough Frank left school, and started working as a farm hand. We can imagine that William looked up to his big brother so when Frank answered the call and enlisted it was clear William would not be far behind him.

Upon leaving school William had found work as a milk delivery boy working for Messrs J and C.W. Mason of Mount Pleasant Dairy. Mount Pleasant Farm is halfway up Kingswood Road on the left.

Information taken from a Kingswood Local History Publication dated July 1990, informs that in 1881 William and Ursula Mason and their three sons lived there. William had established a dairy herd at the farm and it was his sons, Joseph and Charles, who ran the dairy. A point of interest from the publication is that right up until the 1960's the cows were still being milked by hand. Technology was slow to reach Kington. However, it was from Mount Pleasant Dairy that William collected his milk in the morning and delivered it around the town to expectant customers. In an epitaph to William, published in the Kington Times in June 1918, we learn that William was of 'happy and cheerful disposition' and since most of the official records relating to Williams death are sadly lacking most of the detail surrounding his early demise has been taken from this epitaph, which has proven to be an invaluable research source for this biography.



As was expected William followed his brother into the army and enlisted in Leominster in the October of 1917 into the Lancashire Fusiliers, 6th Reserve Battalion, as Private William Griffiths, service number 48524. It is understood that

William was sent to Bridlington to undertake his basic training and it was here that his life was terminated prematurely. The local Coroner convened an inquest and the following details were revealed. On Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May William had reported to the base sickbay. He was seen by a Medical Officer and prescribed 'medicine and duty'. He did not attend parade that day but at 8pm in the evening was complaining of feeling worse. He was not seen by a Doctor again and during the night passed away. At 6:15 the next morning his body was found in his tent. The jury at the inquest found that there had been 'serious neglect on the part of the Army medical authorities'. Williams body was returned to Kington arriving here on the Saturday. He was buried in Kington cemetery, grave reference 2220, on the following afternoon, Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> May. The Kington Times records that 'the interment was attended by a large concourse of people, including an officer from William's regiment and members of the Mission Room Choir, of which William was a member before he enlisted. Local members of the Kington Volunteers attended with Quartermaster Sergeant Bore at their front. The family were offered a firing party be present, but the family had declined this offer. Instead a Sergeant Drummer Cook sounded the 'Last Post' at the conclusion of the service, which was conducted by the Reverend Probyn. Many floral tributes were sent by the people of Kington and the Times reports Elizabeth's heartfelt thanks 'to all those who so kindly sent flowers and have shown her and her family such great sympathy in their bereavement'. William was just nineteen years old when his life was cut short in such needless tragedy. His name is recorded on the Kington Memorial and was read out at the Kington Peace Service held after wars end.

Elizabeth had lost both her boys in quick succession, there was just three months between their deaths. One hundred years later we can only imagine how William and Franks demise affected her and their three sisters. As a final indignity, no records have been identified of any service medals having been presented to the family. One wonders if they would have accepted them anyway. Death records indicate that Elizabeth continued to live in Kington until she died in 1927, aged 69. Williams death was unbelievably sad, and many might say unnecessary. Just another casualty of war.