

# **William Jones**

**Air Mechanic 1<sup>st</sup> Class**

**39334**

**Royal Air Force**



William Jones's story is unusual in so much as he was one of the few Kington men who died serving as an airman and was considerably older than most Kington casualties. William was born in Kington in 1879, the seventh child of James and Mary Ann Jones. James had married Mary Ann Breeze in late 1864 and the following year their first child, Charles James Jones, was born (1865). Charles was followed by Elizabeth (1867), Harriet Jane (1868), Albert Thomas (1871), Evan (1873), Margaret Anne (1876), William the focus of this biography (1879), Marshal (1881), Sidney (1884) and finally Percy (1887). James was a blacksmith and census returns indicate the fledgling family moved regularly. The family started in Mary's birth place, Llanfair-Waterdine, then moved to Pembridge, Kinnersley, Eardisley and finally settling in Kington sometime between the births of Evan and Margaret (1873-1876). Where William went to school is a mystery since his name does not appear on either the Kington Boy's School roll of honour nor that of Lady Hawkins' Grammar School. Many of James's sons took up his trade as Blacksmiths but it appears at some point James acquired access to a dairy farm in Kington which kept many of his younger sons in employment. This may well have been Ashmoor Farm located at Kingswood. The Kington Times records that upon the death of a Mrs. Mitchell much of her property was sold at auction. One lot was Ashmoor Farm and twenty-six acres, tenanted by J. Jones who paid £56 per annum for the privilege. W.H. Jewell paid £4500 for the freehold. A farm of that size would have kept James's sons busy, leaving James to concentrated on the blacksmithing.

William started his military career by joining the Royal Engineers. The Royal Flying Corps had been formed as an Air Battalion of the Royal Engineers under the control



of the Army. Its role was to investigate the viability and worth of what was a wholly innovative method of fighting. On 21<sup>st</sup> April 1916 William transferred into the Royal Flying Corps as 39334, 2<sup>nd</sup> class air mechanic, Jones. Upon enlistment William stated he was a thirty-six-year-old, single, blacksmith and nominated his father, James, of 30 Majors Row, Kington, as his next of kin. He became a member of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1916 when his unit first entered France. The following year, on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1917, he was rated 1<sup>st</sup> Class Airman, his trade being 'fitter' (Air Engineer).

Alongside the army's Royal Flying Corps, the Admiralty had its own combat flying service, the Royal Naval Air Service. Having two military units effectively doing the same task was considered inefficient and on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1918 the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service amalgamated to form the Royal Air Force (RAF), the world's oldest independent national air force.



*Air Mechanic 1st Class insignia*

The RAF had its own Air Ministry and therefore took its place as the third combat service of the United Kingdom. William Jones was automatically transferred into the newly formed RAF on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1918. The armistice of November 1918 led to a relaxation of demands upon all fighting men. Consequently, William was granted leave to travel back to Kington on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1919. Additionally, his services no longer required, was due to be transferred into RAF Reserve on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1919, he never made that transfer. On **23<sup>rd</sup> February 1919**, while at home on leave, William died at the Old Bridge Inn, Kington. His father wrote to the Air Ministry informing them of this tragic event, stating William had died of influenza complicated by pneumonia. It is highly likely William became another casualty of the influenza pandemic sweeping the world in 1918-1919. Today, the pandemic is remembered as the Spanish Flu epidemic.

William died in Kington, but paradoxically no record of his burial exists. In 1917 Brookwood Military Cemetery was created within the boundaries of Brookwood Cemetery, more commonly referred to as the London Necropolis, which is located about thirty miles outside London in Surrey. The military cemetery commemorates those men and women of Commonwealth and American forces who died, many from battle injuries, within the London district. William's name is remembered on the Brookwood (United Kingdom 1914-18) Memorial. This memorial, located within the Military Cemetery, was created in 2004 to commemorate around 500

Commonwealth casualties who died in the United Kingdom during World War One, but for whom no graves have been identified. The lack of burial details is even more perplexing considering the fact the people of Kington held William in such high esteem that his family were presented with the most amazing memorial scroll in remembrance of his service to King and Country.



*Memorial scroll dedicated to William Jones, a respected member of the community who served his King and Country with honour*

The nation also remembered his service by posthumously awarding him the British War and Victory Medals. After his death Williams financial accounts were made up, his effects of £17 4s 8d were passed to his father in June 1919.

William survived the war only to fall victim to an indiscriminate and deadly disease. But the family's grief was compounded later that year when James Jones, the patriarch of this large family, also died, at the age of seventy-eight. Arguably the grief of losing his son in such unforgiving circumstances contributed to his death, we will never know. All Williams brothers survived the war and were present at the funeral of their mother Mary Ann who died 9<sup>th</sup> November 1924. Mary was also seventy-eight and even though she had lived in Kington for fifty years, was buried at St Michael and All Angels, Lyonshall.

