

## **Corporal William Osborn Bush**

**Regimental number: 2731**

**8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, The Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment**

**born: about 1890 - died: 4 May 1916**

Corporal William Osborn Bush was born in about 1890 in Wargrave, Berkshire, the only child of William and Jessie Elizabeth Bush.<sup>1</sup> William's father was born in about 1843 in Westminster, London and his mother (the former Jessie Elizabeth Townsend) in about 1853 in Wargrave. His parents were married at the St George's Church in Ramsgate on 18 October 1888.<sup>2</sup>

In 1871, William's father was a barrister's clerk and living in Lambeth in London.<sup>3</sup> At some point, William's father moved to Berkshire because, in 1881, he was living in Blenheim Cottage on High Street in Wargrave, next door to the Townsends.<sup>4</sup> His future wife, Jessie, was living there with her parents Henry and Mary. William's father was now an assistant overseer and collector of rates and taxes.

In 1891, the family was still living at Blenheim Cottage.<sup>5</sup> Shortly thereafter a series of deaths befell the family. William's grandmother, who had been living with the family in 1891, died near the end of 1893.<sup>6</sup> A few months later, his father died.<sup>7</sup> Then less two years later, his mother died.<sup>8</sup> She was buried on 26 December 1895 in St Mary's Church in Wargrave. William was now an orphan, with no parents or grandparents.<sup>9</sup>

At the age of 11, William was an inmate at the Sir Josiah Masons Orphanage in Erdington, Birmingham.<sup>10</sup> Unlike many other orphanages, this orphanage required that candidates for admission were orphans in the strictest sense – that is, both parents were dead.<sup>11</sup> Boys were admitted between the ages of seven to ten years old and left when they were fourteen. This means that William may have been there by 1897 and would have left the orphanage by 1904. In 1911, he was living with John James and Sarah Jane Parker at 20 South Side, Clapham Common, London S.W.<sup>12</sup> The Parkers were both born in Yorkshire – John James in Leeds in about 1856 and Sarah Jane (née Smith) in about 1861 in Churwell. John was a caretaker and Sarah a housekeeper for a confectioner.

William enlisted in the Royal West Surrey Regiment in London and joined the British Expeditionary Force in France on 31 August 1915. He died just eight months later.

In April 1916, the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion of Royal West Surrey Regiment was stationed near Dranoutre, Belgium.<sup>13</sup> The Battalion's tour in the trenches between 27 - 29 April was generally quiet, with the exception of machine gun and rifle fire at night. However, the Battalion was on gas alert the whole time as the wind was generally from the east. Enemy deserters and prisoners of war reported the presence of gas in the German trenches. At 12.40 a.m. on 30 April there were rapid bursts of enemy machine gun fire and then at 12.45 a.m. "Gas was released in dense clouds and swept all over the Brigade front lasting until 2 a.m. Our machine guns swept the enemy parapet with the intention of piercing any gas cylinders."<sup>14</sup> Enemy parties attempted, and at one point succeeded, in entering the trenches. They were repulsed with bomb attacks. The gas had passed over by 2 a.m. but the Battalion suffered 110 casualties, mainly because of the gas. "Very little warning was given of the arrival of gas as the enemy's machine gun fire successfully deafened the noise of egress from the pipes."<sup>15</sup>

William was likely injured in this gas attack because he died of gas poisoning on the 4 May at the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Casualty Clearing Station.<sup>16</sup> The effects of the gas attacks were also felt at the 1<sup>st</sup> CCCS, stationed near Bailleul,<sup>17</sup> which was just about five miles from Dranoutre. William lost four comrades from his battalion in those few days at the end of April and beginning of May: Private Elvin Harry Davis, Private Harry Ernest Homer, Private Richard Westfield and Private James Taylor. Most of his comrades had been poisoned by chlorine gas.

William was a member of the Church of England<sup>18</sup> and was buried in the Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord (Plot II. Row D, Grave 2).<sup>19</sup> Bailleul is in France, close to the Belgian border. It was occupied on 14 October 1914 and became an important railhead, air depot and hospital centre. Several Casualty Clearing Stations, including the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian, were quartered there for considerable periods. The earliest Commonwealth burials at Bailleul were made in April 1915. An extension was built and burials continued until April 1918, and occurred again in September and after the Armistice, when graves were brought in from the neighbouring battlefields.<sup>20</sup>

William's next-of-kin was identified as Mrs L. E. Jones, living at 52 Englewood Road, Clapham Common, London.<sup>21</sup> In the chaplains' journal it is indicated that she was his sister, however, this was not the case. Louisa Ellen Jones (née Pratt) was the wife of Alfred Parker Jones and, in 1911, was living at 161 Bedford Hill, Balham, London.<sup>22</sup> She was a sweet shop keeper. When she was identified as William's next-of-kin, Louisa was living less than a mile away from where William had been living in 1911. She was his "grantee" and received the monies owing to him from the army after his death.<sup>23</sup>

There is no evidence of the connection between William and Louisa. There may have been a connection through the confectionary trade between the Parkers and Louisa Jones. However, it may have not been a personal connection, as one of Louisa's addresses on William's medal rolls index card is a solicitors' firm in Lowestoft, Suffolk.

William was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914-15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).<sup>24</sup> However, the medals may never have been delivered to anybody as instructions were sought for the destruction of the medals in 1920.

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<sup>1</sup> 1891 census "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 10 September 2015), entry for William O. Bush, Registration district: Wokingham, ED, institution, or vessel: 1, Piece: 1001, Folio: 4, Page Number: 1

<sup>2</sup> "England Marriages 1538-1973," *findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 10 September 2015), entry for William Bush, County: Kent

<sup>3</sup> 1871 census "1871 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 10 September 2015), entry for William Bush, Registration district: Lambeth, Sub-registration district: Kennington Second, ED, institution, or vessel: 34, Household schedule number: 140, Piece: 680, Folio: 32, Page Number: 26

<sup>4</sup> 1881 census "1881 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 26 September 2015), entry for William Bush, Registration district: Wokingham, ED, institution, or vessel: 1, Piece: 1312, Folio: 4, Page Number: 1

<sup>5</sup> "1891 England Census," entry for William O. Bush

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- <sup>6</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Death Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 20 September 2015), entry for Mary Ann Bush, Registration district: Wokingham, Inferred County: Berkshire, Volume: 2c, Page: 240
- <sup>7</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Death Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 10 September 2015), entry for William Bush, Registration district: Wokingham, Inferred County: Berkshire, Volume: 2c, Page: 291
- <sup>8</sup> "Berkshire Burial Index," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 10 September 2015), entry for Jessie Elizabeth Bush, County: Berkshire
- <sup>9</sup> His paternal grandfather, Edward Seaman Bush, had died in 1857 and his maternal grandparents, Henry and Mary Townsend in 1886 and 1888, respectively. "London, England, Deaths and Burials, 1813-1980," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 23 September 2015), entry for Edward Seaman Bush, Borough: Kensington and Chelsea, Register Type: Bishop's Transcript; "England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966." *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 17 December 2015), entry for Henry Townsend; FreeBMD Death Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 26 September 2015), entry for Mary Townsend, Registration district: Wokingham, Inferred County: Berkshire, Volume: 2c, Page: 276
- <sup>10</sup> "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 10 September 2015), entry for William O. Bush, Registration district: Aston, Sub-registration district: Erdington, ED, institution, or vessel: Sir Josiah Masons Orphanage, Piece: 2876, Folio: 195, Page Number: 8, Household schedule number: 1
- <sup>11</sup> "Warwickshire Homes: Josiah Mason's Orphanage, Erdington, Birmingham, Warwickshire," *Children's Homes* (<http://www.childrenshomes.org.uk/BirminghamMason/>; accessed 26 September 2015)
- <sup>12</sup> "1911 England, Wales & Scotland Census," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 10 September 2015), entry for William Osborn Bush, District: Wandsworth, Registration district number: 26, Enumeration district: 20, Sub district: Clapham, Sub district number: 4, Census reference: RG14PN2270 RG78PN77 RD26 SD4 ED20 SN56, Piece number: 2270, Folio: -, Page: -
- <sup>13</sup> "UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914-1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 August 2015), Regiment or Unit: Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment, Sub Unit: 8th Battalion, Division: 24th Division, Diary Dates: 1915 Aug 1 - 1916 Aug 31, Piece Description: Piece 2214/1-5: 72 Infantry Brigade: 8 Battalion Queen's (Royal West Surrey) (1915 Aug - 1918 Jan), Piece Number: 2214
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," *Library and Archives Canada*, (records accessed 2013 & 2015), Record Group 9, series IIC10, volume 4556, Record number 83
- <sup>17</sup> "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* ([http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202\\_e.html&r=1&f=G](http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G); accessed 17 June 2015)
- <sup>18</sup> "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Record number 83
- <sup>19</sup> "Commonwealth War Graves Commission," ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org); accessed 28 August 2015), entry for Bush, W.O., Service No: 2731
- <sup>20</sup> "Bailleul Communal Cemetery, Nord," Commonwealth War Graves Commission (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2000047/Bailleul%20Communal%20Cemetery.%20Nord>; accessed 5 August 2015)
- <sup>21</sup> "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Record number 83
- <sup>22</sup> "1911 England, Wales & Scotland Census," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 10 September 2015), entry for Alfred Parker Jones, District: Wandsworth, Registration district number: 26, Subdistrict: Wandsworth, Subdistrict number: 26, Enumeration district: 20, Sub district: Clapham, Sub district number: 20, Sub district: Streatham, Sub district number: 5, Census reference: RG14PN2315 RG78PN78A RD26 SD5 ED30 SN258, Piece number: 2315, Folio: -, Page: -
- <sup>23</sup> "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 10 September 2015), entry William Osborn Bush

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<sup>24</sup> "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 10 September 2015), entry for Wm O. Bush