

Private William Henry Billings

Regimental number: 18251

7th Battalion, King's Shropshire Light Infantry

born: 1897 - died: 6 July 1918

Private William Henry Billings, born in about 1897, was the son of John and Alice Billings of Bodenham, Herefordshire.¹ His father was born in about 1858 in Bodenham and his mother, the former Alice Green, was born in about 1855 in Marden, Herefordshire. John and Alice were married near Hereford in the autumn of 1889. They had seven children – six of whom survived until 1911:² Harriett Ester (born in 1891), Alice (born in 1893), Emily (born in 1895), William, Charles Joseph (born in 1899) and John Robert (born in 1900).³

William's father, who was a general labourer, died in 1910.⁴ In 1911, four of the six children were living with their widowed mother, who was doing laundry work.⁵ A grandson, Albert Ernest Billings was living with them. Perhaps this was the son of one of William's sisters, as William and his younger brothers were probably too young to have a son. His two eldest sisters (Harriet and Alice) were working as domestic servants in homes in or near Bodenham at the time. William, who was fourteen, was living at home and working as a mason's labourer.

William enlisted as a Private in the King's Shropshire Light Infantry.⁶ Little information is available about his military service. The 7th Battalion was specifically raised for the Great War in Shrewsbury



W. H. Billings in Pernes British Military Cemetery
(Source: Author, July 2015)

in September 1914.⁷ It joined the Front in September 1915 and remained in that theatre for the duration of the war. It took part in the offensives of the summer of 1918 and was disbanded in June 1919. The 7th suffered more casualties than any other King's Shropshire Light Infantry battalion, with 1,048 killed in action or died during the Great War, but also more battle honours than any other battalion.

William was one of those casualties. He had already died when he was admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 7 July 1918 with severe shell wounds to his legs and feet.⁸ He was a member of the Church of England and was buried the same day in the Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 5, Row D, Grave 48) with the chaplain, J. K. Tibbits presiding. He was one of 39 soldiers to die at the 1st CCCS in July 1918⁹ and one of over 1,000 First World War soldiers buried in the Pernes British Military Cemetery – most of them were soldiers who died at one of the nearby clearing stations.¹⁰ This cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when the 1st and 4th Canadian Casualty Clearing Stations came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.¹¹

His mother was notified of his death and received the monies owing to him by the army after his death.¹²

Unfortunately, just under four months after William died, his brother, Charles also died in the service of his country. William's brother, Charles, enlisted in the 12th Battalion of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry in Shrewsbury¹³ and later transferred to the 3rd Battalion of the King's (Liverpool) Regiment. Charles died of illness on 21 October 1918 while serving in Cork, Ireland.¹⁴ He was buried in St Michael's Churchyard in Bodenham.¹⁵

Both brothers were awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre)¹⁶ and are both recognized on the list of the fallen from Herefordshire.¹⁷

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¹ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 May 2015), entry for William Billings, Registration district: Leominster, Sub-registration district: Bodenham, ED, institution, or vessel: 5, Piece: 2495, Folio: 32, Page Number: 9, Household schedule number: 63

² "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 May 2015), entry for William Billings, Registration district: Leominster, Registration District Number: 230, Sub-registration district: Bodenham, ED, institution, or vessel: 5, Household schedule number: 89, Piece: 15815

³ "1901 England Census," entry for William Billings

⁴ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Death Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 May 2015), entry for John R. Billings, Registration district: Leominster, Inferred County: Herefordshire, Volume: 6a, Page: 331

⁵ "1911 England Census," entry for William Billings

⁶ "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 620

⁷ "The King's Shropshire Light Infantry, 1914 - 1918," *Shropshire Regimental Museum* (<http://www.shropshireregimentalmuseum.co.uk/regimental-history/shropshire-light-infantry/the-kings-shropshire-light-infantry-1914-1918/>; accessed 4 May 2015)

⁸ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Record number 620

⁹ "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)

¹⁰ "Pernes British Military Cemetery" *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/11600/PERNES%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>; accessed 13 January 2015)

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 May 2015), entry for William Billings

¹³ "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 May 2015), entry for Charles Joseph Billings

¹⁴ "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 May 2015), entry for Charles Joseph Billings

¹⁵ "Commonwealth War Graves Commission," (www.cwgc.org; accessed 4 May 2015), entry for Billings, C. J., Service No: 93766

¹⁶ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 4 May 2015), entries for William Billings and Charles Joseph Billings

¹⁷ "First World War - names of the fallen in Herefordshire," *Worcester News* (http://www.worcesternews.co.uk/archive/2014/08/09/11397127.First_World_War___names_of_the_fallen_in_Herefordshire_A__D/; accessed 4 May 2015)