

CODDINGTON

Remembering the Fallen of the First World War

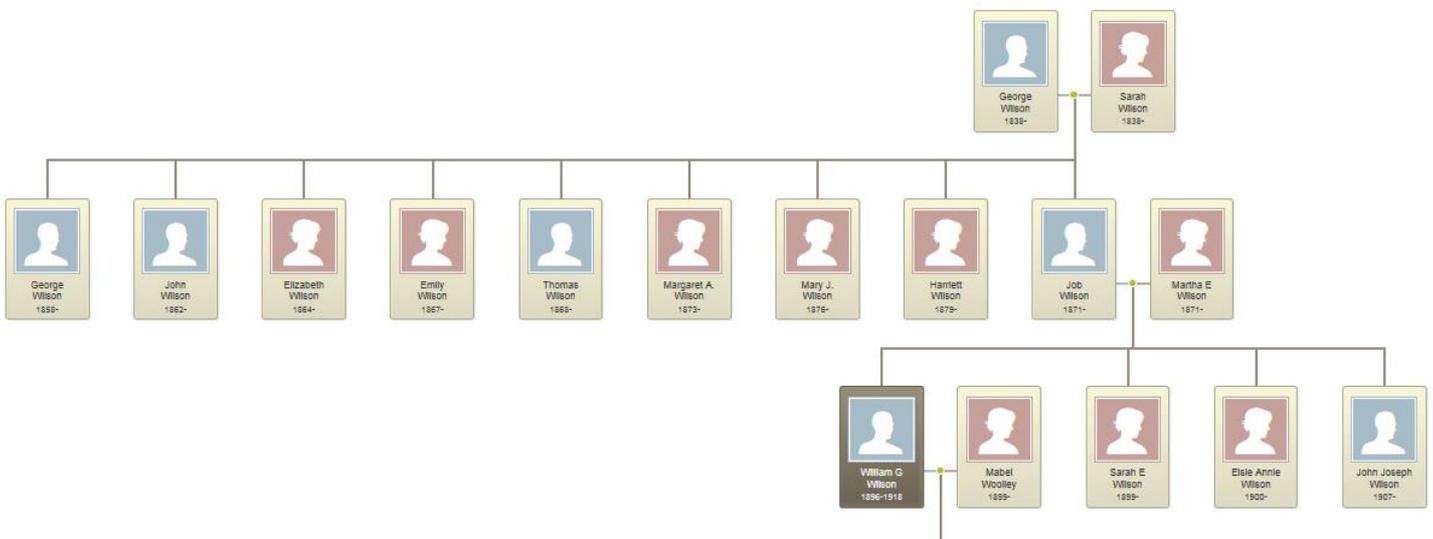
Driver 229950 **WILLIAM GEORGE WILSON**

(1896-1918)

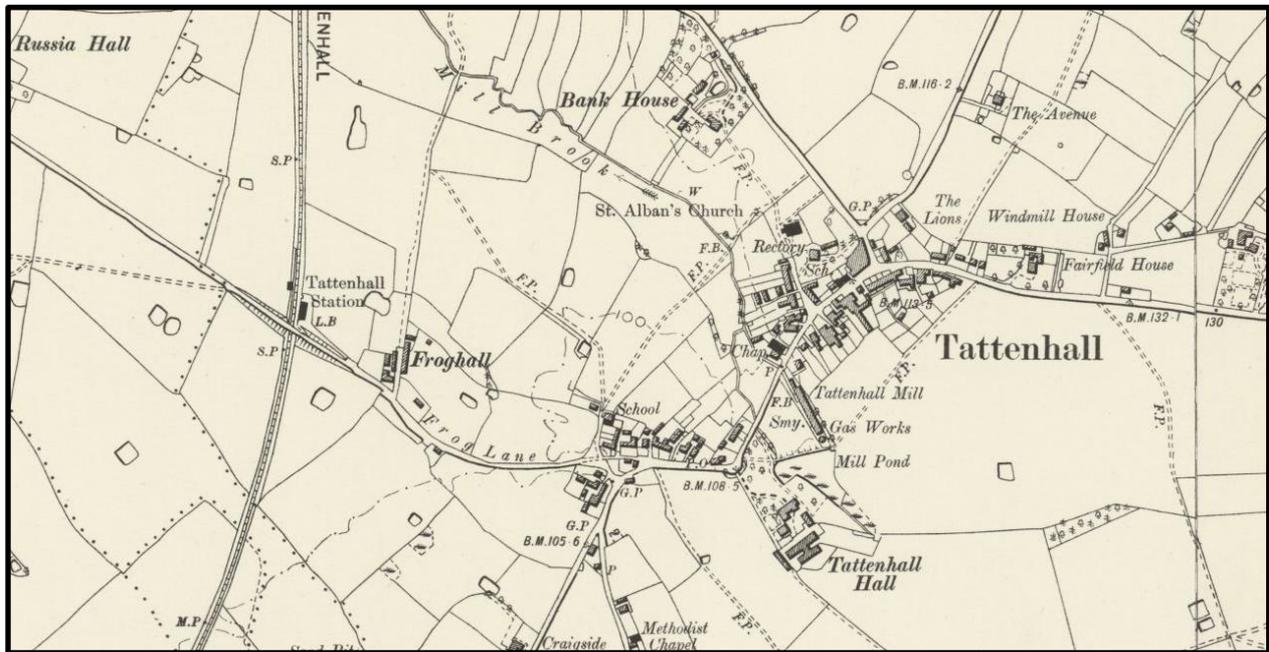
Royal Field Artillery

William, the eldest child of Job and Martha Wilson, was born on 12 October 1896 in Tattenhall, Cheshire and was baptised at Tattenhall church by the then Rector, Charles Arundel, on 22 November.

Job Wilson had been born in Tattenhall in 1871, into a family of farm workers in Tattenhall Lanes. In 1891 he was working at Square House Farm, Tattenhall Lanes, as a wagoner on the farm of Elizabeth Saddler who was by then a widow of seventy-seven. Four years later on 9 April 1895, he married Martha Elizabeth Price from Goldborne (near Handley). Martha was the daughter of William and Emma Price from Goldborne David and had been baptised on 13 March 1870 at Handley. Her father William was a farm labourer who died in 1872 at the age of 30 and Emma was working as a charwoman and living with Martha and her two younger sisters in Goldborne Lane. William and Martha were married by banns at Coddington church on 9 April 1895 by the Reverend F C Roys and their address was given as Chowley.

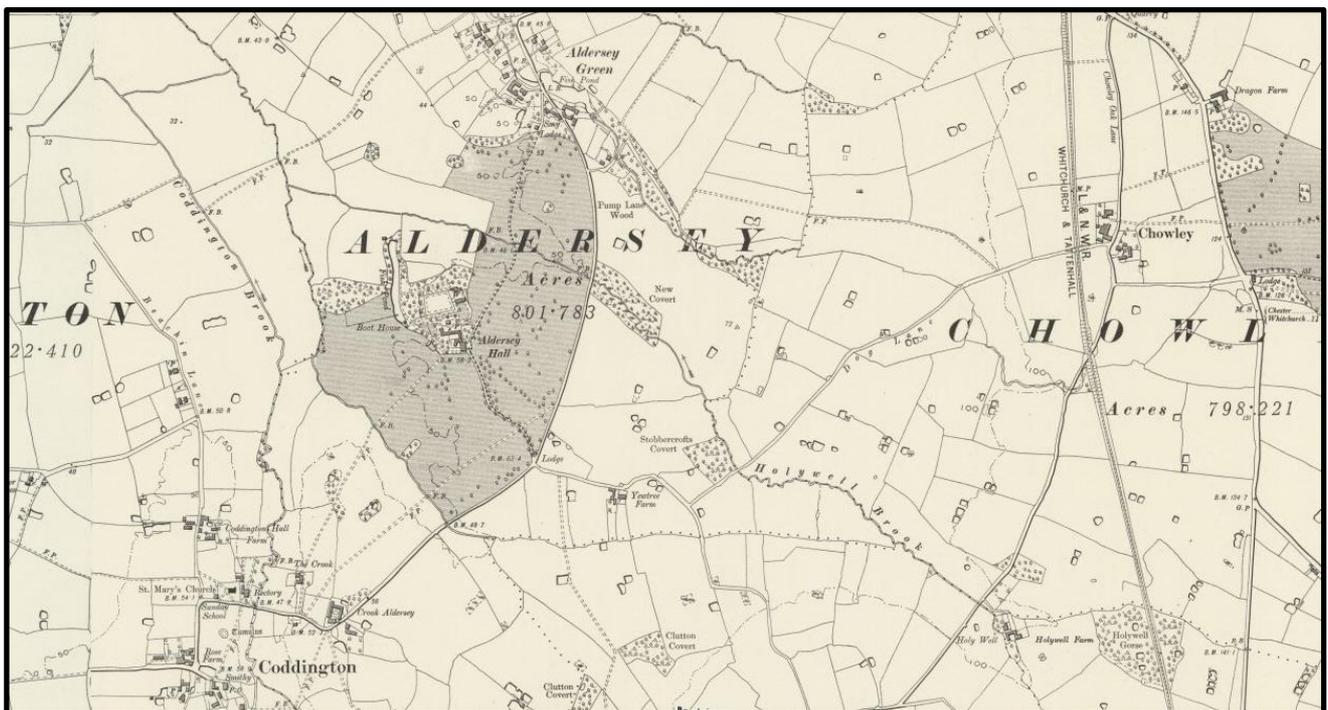


William George Wilson was born in 1896 and by 1901 two more daughters, Sarah and Elsie, had arrived and the family were living in Frog Lane, Tattenhall. Job's occupation was given as 'Horse Man at Corn Mill', possibly the mill of John Jones on Bolesworth Road. In 1911 The Wilson's had moved to Aldersey, had another son (John) and Job was working as a wagoner on a farm. William had moved out of the family home and was working as a labourer on the Rutter family farm in Aldersey. This farm was being run by 21 year old John Rutter and his sister Mary – the larger Rutter farm, run by father Hugh, was close by. This would have given the young William quite a large amount of responsibility at the age of 14.



Left: Frog Lane, entering Tattenhall

Below: Map of 1895 showing Aldersey, Chowley, and Coddington



After war broke out William signed up and joined the 15th Brigade Royal Field Artillery where William was given the position of driver. The drivers were the men on horseback in the gun teams and were also responsible for transporting ammunition. This was probably because William had had experience with horses on the farm. Controlling a team of six horses on the ammunition column pulling about a ton of gun was a skillful job so the gun drivers needed to be the most experienced and skilled riders especially when the horses were exposed to shellfire.



Cap badge of the Royal Field Artillery

The Royal Field Artillery (RFA) provided artillery support for the British Army. The Royal Horse Artillery was responsible for light, mobile guns that provided firepower in support of the cavalry and the Royal Field Artillery. In 1914 the establishment of the RHA was one battery to each brigade of cavalry. A battery had six 13-pounder field guns and included 5 officers and 200 men. Motive power was supplied by the battery's 228 horses. The original BEF included only one division of cavalry of 4 brigades, and thus it had four batteries RHA, which were organised into two brigades.

The Royal Horse Artillery were paid slightly more than the Royal Field Artillery and this may have had something to do with their slightly different role. RHA batteries were brigaded with cavalry units. With their lighter 13-pounder QF Mk1 guns, they were trained to pull the guns at a gallop and across open country whereas the Royal Field Artillery had the heavier 18-pounder guns. The Field Artillery training manual 1914 said that each driver was responsible for two horses and their harness. As a gun team had six horses (for an 18 pounder) this meant each gun team had three drivers and five gunners, one of whom would be the bombardier.



Left: Royal Field Artillery on the move in 1915
Below: The uniform of a Driver in the R.F.A.



The job of a driver was very dangerous as they quite often came well within range of the German gunners and made an easy target. One part of a regiment's diary says they *'lost 9 drivers in one week to shellfire at just one corner which could only be negotiated at night – massive roadblocks built up on the daytime of horses, wagons and ammunition. The wagons could only go through one at a time as the enemy batteries fired on the position frequently through the night in the hope of hitting one,*

which they often did. The army kept teams on night shift all along the stretch of road so if a wagon were hit they would clean up the mess and get the road open again.

In 1915 the XV Brigade were in action at the Second Battle of Ypres and the Capture of Hill 60. It is not known exactly when William arrived in France, but it is possible he was with the Brigade in 1916 by the time they had moved south to reinforce The Somme and saw action at High Wood, the Battle of Guillemonte and the Battle of Morval.

(NB. There are two medal card records for William G Wilson, a Driver in the RFA. One card for Driver no.229950 is certainly the William we are concerned with, as this is confirmed by other documents such as his record of personal effects which mentions his wife's name. The other is for Driver no. 14616, which is for William G Wilson of the 15th Brigade R.F.A. showing he was in action on 19 August 1914. This would mean he was either full time in army, a reservist or a trained territorial and not a volunteer. However, the medal rolls for the British Medal and the Victory Medal do not correspond, suggesting they are not the same man. Extensive research has failed to produce conclusive evidence as the service records and pension records have not survived. It is more likely our William was conscripted and was in France sometime from 1916.)

In 1917 William had some leave and returned home, where he married Mabel Woolley in the spring. Mabel was the daughter of John Woolley, a general carter from Spurstow, and Mary Jones from Burwardsley (they had been married at Bickerton church in 1894). Mabel Woolley was born 5 years later in Bulkeley, so was only eighteen years old when she married William Wilson in 1917. William and Mabel's daughter, Edna May Wilson, was born late summer that year, but it is not known if William ever saw his young daughter.

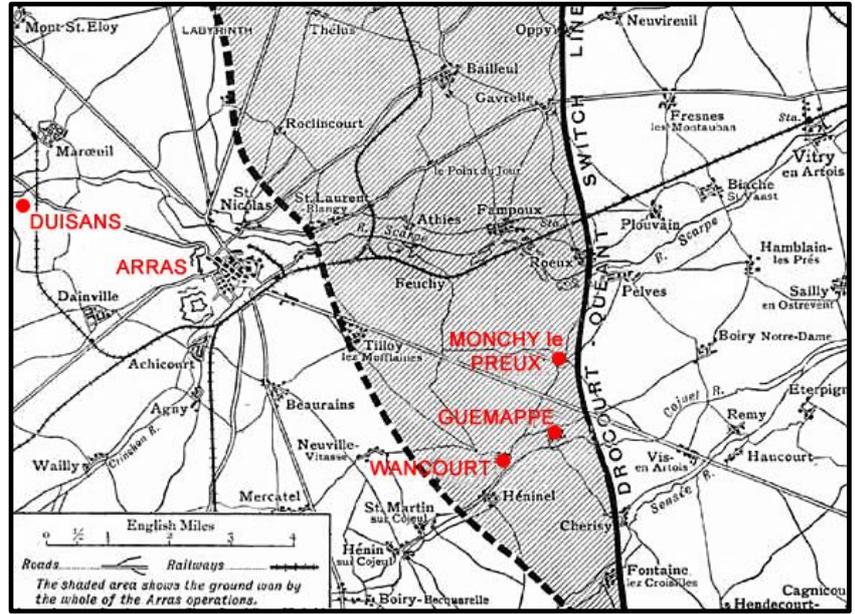
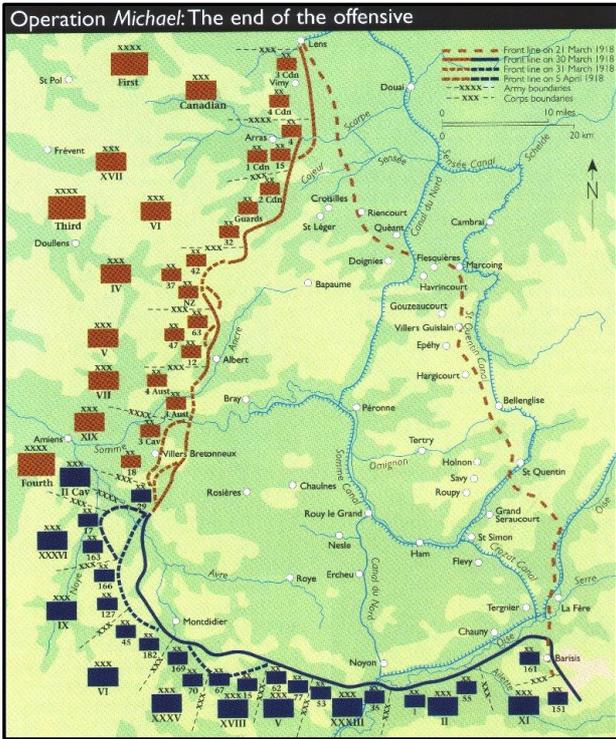
In March 1917 the 15th brigade was involved in the battles for Arras and in September they were moved out of line for a period of rest before being sent to Flanders where they were in action in the Third Battle of Ypres. They then moved to The Somme where they were more or less in continuous action involving complex, overlapping Allied attacks over the old battlegrounds until late October 1918.

Duisans British Cemetery, Etrun

Although it is impossible to know for sure exactly where William George Wilson was, what is certain is that he was killed in action on 4 April 1918 and was buried in the cemetery at Duisans British Cemetery, Erun Plot VI F.29. about 9 kilometers west of Arras.



The site of this cemetery was used by the 8th Casualty Clearing Station until around the time of William's burial. It is likely that he lost his life as the Allied forces to the east of Arras were being over-run in a desperate attempt to defend the town, in the face of the last major German onslaught known as Operation Michael, which began on 21 March 1918.

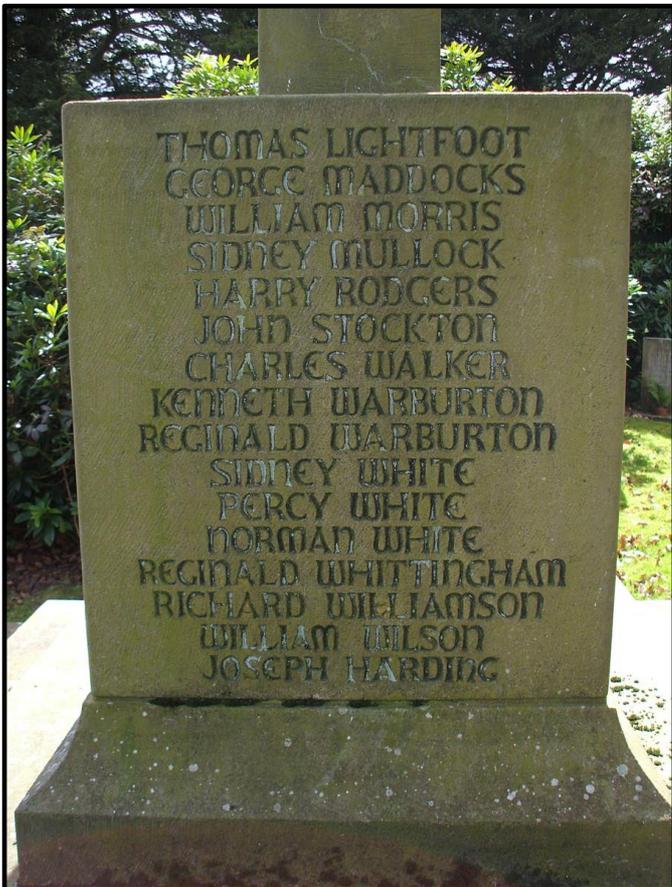
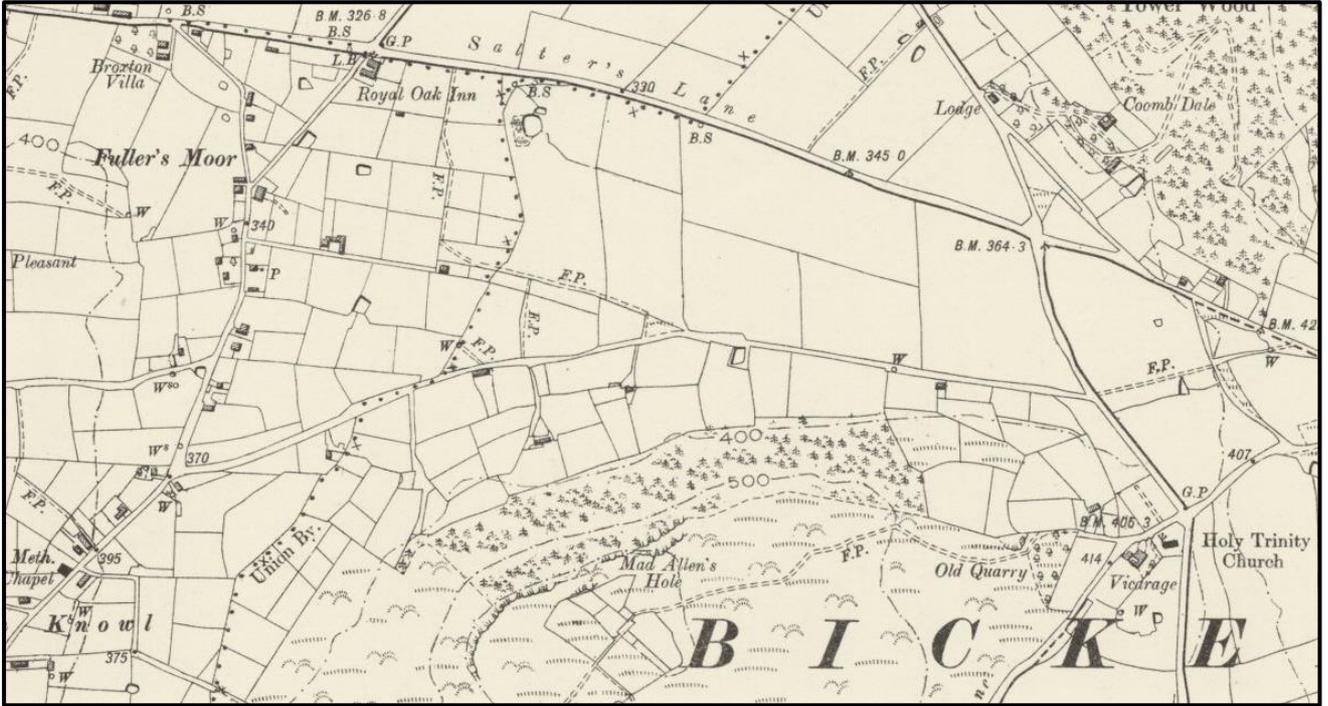


Left: Operation Michael March/April 1918, with Arras to the North.
Right: The operation in defence of Arras, showing Duisans where William was taken to the casualty clearing station.



Bickerton Memorial

As well as being remembered on the Coddington memorial, William Wilson's name also appears on the war memorial at Bickerton Church – his widow Martha and daughter Edna were living close by at Fullers Moor.



Above: Map of 1895 showing Fuller's Moor to the West and Bickerton Church in the South East. The war memorial, left and below, is in the churchyard facing the Church.



Name.		Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
WILSON,		RFA	Over	22 9950
William G.				
Medal.	Coll.	Page.	Remarks.	
VICTORY	B			
BRITISH	RFA/304 -	40841		
STAR	do			
Theatre of War first served in				
Date of entry therein				

K. 1380



Above: William Wilson's Medal Card showing the award of the British Medal and the Victory Medal (right).

Below: Army records showing the official entry of William's effects and award to this widow Mabel.

Record No.	Registry No.	Soldier's Name	Regiment, Rank, No.	Date and Place of Death	CREDITS			CHARGES			Date of Authority	To whom Authorised	Amount Authorised			No. of List in which advertised	
					Account and Date	£	s.	d.	Account and Date	£			s.	d.	£		s.
658390	593651	Wilson William George	R. F. A. 15. D. A. B. Over. 229750	4.4.18 in action France	London No. 1 5.18.	5	11	5	5	11	5	17.6.18 17.6.18	Wid. Mabel Wid. Mabel	5	11	5	2 children Mabel
						3	-	-									

WAR GRATUITY.
Effects 10/13/1919
Transfer 6536
Regd. Paper 14055 866
Serial No. 24446

In Memory of
Driver
W G Wilson

229950, 15th Div. Ammunition Coy., Royal Field Artillery who died on 04 April 1918

Husband of M. Wilson, of Fullers Moor, Broxton, Cheshire.

Remembered with Honour
Duisans British Cemetery, Etrun



Commemorated in perpetuity by
the Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Researched and written

By

Hilary Williams