

## **Bill Plant: an Aldridge Man Who Died During World War One**

by Linda Mason, 10 November 2018



This handsome looking young man is my Great Uncle Bill. He is another man from Aldridge and from my family, who did not make it home from the killing fields of World War 1.

William (Bill) Plant was born in the late spring of 1895 at 12 Rollingmill Street, Pleck, Walsall and baptised just up the canal towpath at St Andrew's Church, Birchills, Walsall. Mom was [Rose, nee Turner an indomitable woman](#) who gave birth to 15 children including my maternal Grandmother, by her husband George Plant. George was the son of Thomas an industrious man who worked hard all his life as poulterer and greengrocer, pub landlord and farmer but who wasn't [beyond poaching](#) from the estate of Sir Robert Peel! George was industrious too, well you needed to be with all those children to clothe and feed and his final work was as a haulier in Aldridge.

The family moved to Green Lane, Aldridge whilst William was still toddling and he and his siblings knew the village well. They knew the orchards ripe for apple scrumping, the fields where the best mushrooms could be picked and where to hang around to earn a penny or two for fetching and carrying. The family moved again to a small cottage on the Walsall Road, it's still there, standing behind the cottage right next to the old mile marker just by the junction to Paddock Lane. The house shared a water pump with surrounding cottages in the yard, there was no running water indoors but there was a decent sized range where Rose kept a pot of her famous broth bubbling away. My Dad remembers it all very well.

By 1911 and 15 years old William was earning money as a carter haulier as was his younger brother Frank, just 13. This would have been today's equivalent of a white van man but with a horse and cart, ferrying goods and people about the area as required.

It is not known precisely when William enlisted in the 2nd Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment, a regular army battalion but it was done in Walsall and I would suggest it was just prior to WW1 breaking out as he was disembarking in France on 12 August 1914. It appears however, that

William became ill not long after arriving in France as there is a report in The Walsall Advertiser on Saturday 10 October 1914 that reads:

*"Private William Plant, of Aldridge, has been home from his regiment, the 2nd South Staffs, stricken with fever but has now returned"*

The 2nd Battalion were active on the Western Front right from the start and were involved in trench warfare, advances, diversionary tactics and attacks. It must have been a truly horrendous experience for a young man used to life in a village, who perhaps had joined for adventure and experience, to find himself knee deep and more, in mud on a regular basis, never being dry, vermin at every point and actively fighting on a regular basis, seeing friends and comrades being injured and dying in horrific circumstances. All that noise, blood, guts and gore. He must have witnessed scenes no young man of 18/19 should have to, nor any person of any age should for that matter.

Dawn of 10 March 1915 arrived. William's battalion were to be involved in an attack on the enemy positions just north east of Givenchy. Artillery bombardment began at 7.30 am with the infantry advancing in three columns against the enemy's trenches half an hour later. The war diaries for that day make for distressing reading. The Infantry were mown down in crossfire, with two particular enemy machine gunners taking down many men. Further artillery bombardments took place as did further advances and many acts of bravery were witnessed. The attack continued throughout the day. Three Officers lost their lives, two were wounded and one was listed as missing. For the infantry, 24 lost their lives, 74 were wounded and 33 were listed as missing. William Plant was one of the Infantry that lost his life that day, just 19 years old.

The Walsall Observer reported William's death on 3 April 1915.

*"Official intimation has been received by Mr George Plant, haulier of Walsall Road, Aldridge, stating that his son, Private William Plant (19) was killed in action while serving with the 2nd South Staffs during the Givenchy fighting on March 10. He joined the army about four years ago and out in the firing line has been in charge of a machine gun. Two brothers - George (28) and Frank (17) are serving with the Royal Field Artillery."*

I think George was distressed and could not recall the passage of time correctly, as William could not have served for four years, he would have been far too young to have signed up at the tender age of 15.

William had made a will in favour of his parents and they jointly shared the £9 12s 6d he was owed by the Army and paid in July 1915 plus the war gratuity of £5 paid in May 1919. William was awarded the British War Medal and a Victory Medal despite having been dead for over three years when the Armistice came into being.

He is buried at Guards Cemetery Windy Corner Cuinchy. Cuinchy is a village about 7kms east of the town of Bethune and N41 which runs between Bethune and La Basse. About 1km north of the village are crossroads known as Windy Corner. The cemetery is a little west of these crossroads. This is where a house was used as a battalion headquarters and dressing station.

Rose was devastated by the death of William. She remembered him with fondness to her dying day on 10 November 1950, as my Dad can testify. For several years after William's death she placed memorials in The Walsall Observer on the anniversary of his death. This is the one from March 11 1916:

*"In loving memory of my dear son Private William Plant, 2nd South Staffs Regiment, who was killed in action on March 10 1915. Fondly remembered by his Mother."*

Fondly remembered by his Mother and never forgotten by those in the family that came after.

