

**Rifleman Gilbert William Frank Griffin**  
**Regimental Number: 54066**  
**1/5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, South Lancashire Regiment**

**born: January 1899 - died: 21 May 1918**

Gilbert William Frank Griffin was born in January 1899 in Hilperton, near Trowbridge, Wiltshire.<sup>1 2</sup> He was the son of Frederick Griffin and his wife, Clara Jane.<sup>3</sup> Frederick and his wife had had eight children, six of whom were still living in 1911. They were living at 39 March Road in Trowbridge. In addition to Gilbert, they had three other sons: Reginald Henry J. (born 1894),<sup>4</sup> Wilfred J. F. (born 1898)<sup>5</sup> and Edgar W. B. (born about 1904);<sup>6</sup> and two daughters: Gertrude K. S. (born 1896)<sup>7</sup> and Christabel V. E. (born 1910)<sup>8</sup>. Their father, Frederick, was a foreman in a milk factory.<sup>9</sup>

On 15 April 1915, just 16 years old, Gilbert enlisted in the Territorial Force, County of Surrey.<sup>10</sup> At that time, the minimum age of enlistment for the Territorial Forces was 17.<sup>11</sup> On 24 September, he was discharged from the Territorial Force, presumably because he was under age. On 20 December 1916, just before his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, he re-enlisted in the South Lancashire Regiment for general service for the duration of the war. He was attested to the Army Reserve. At the time, he was a labourer; he was 5' 5¼" tall and weighed 117 pounds.

On 5 March 1917, he was mobilized from the Reserve to the army and posted to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment on 10 March 1917. In March 1918, he received a positive recommendation from a commanding officer in the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry: "This man has been with ... since 8.12.17 and during this period he has been honest, sober, intelligent & industrious. He is a good worker."

By January 1918, he was old enough to serve overseas so, on 13 April 1918, he joined the British Expeditionary Force in France and was transferred to the 1/5 Battalion of the South Lancashire Regiment (Regimental number: 54066) on 15 April 1918. The Battalion saw action in the Battle of the Lys, including the Defence of Givenchy, between 9 and 17 April.<sup>12</sup>

Just as he arrived in France, his older brother, Wilfred James Frederick Griffin, was killed. Wilfred, a Private in the Machine Gun Corps and just 20 years old, was killed in action on 11 April 1918.<sup>13</sup> As he has no known grave, his death is commemorated on the Ploegsteert Memorial in Hainaut, Belgium, just south of Ypres.<sup>14</sup>

Just over a month later, and a month after he arrived in France, Gilbert was admitted to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Casualty Clearing Station with gun shot wounds to his shoulder, thigh and abdomen.<sup>15</sup> He died the same day, 21 May 1918, at the age of 19 years and 4 months. He was buried that day in Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 1, Row F, Grave 28). He was a member of the Church of England and the chaplain, J. K. Tibbitts, presided over his burial. His mother, still living at 39 March Road in Trowbridge, was notified of his death. She had lost two sons in just over a month. His father received the monies owing to Gilbert after his death.<sup>16</sup>

On 21 May, 294 soldiers were admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, bringing the total number of patients to 337.<sup>17</sup> In the whole month of May, there were 115 deaths at this CCCS – more than in any of the other three and a half months that the 1<sup>st</sup> CCCS was in Pernes. The Pernes British Military Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Casualty Clearing Stations came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance.<sup>18</sup>

When Gilbert's possessions were returned to his mother, they included two letters, disc and chain with two coins attached, a cigarette case, two photos, a pipe, a cap badge, a damaged purse, seven coins, a wallet, one postcard and a medical card.<sup>19</sup>

There is no evidence that the eldest brother served in World War I. In his early years, he was a porter.<sup>20</sup> He appears to have married in 1921<sup>21</sup> and died in Wiltshire in 1952.<sup>22</sup>

Gilbert was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) and the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 4 December 2014), entry for Gilbert William F. Griffin, Registration district: Melksham, Inferred County: Wiltshire, Volume: 5a, Page: 115

<sup>2</sup> "British Army Service Records 1914-1920," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk); accessed 4 December 2014), entry for Gilbert William Frank Griffin, Series: WO 363

<sup>3</sup> "1911 England, Wales & Scotland Census," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk); accessed 30 November 2014), entry for Gilbert W. F. Griffin, District: Melksham, County; Registration district number: 247, Subdistrict: Trowbridge, Subdistrict number: 2, ED, institution or vessel: 2, Household schedule number: 61, Piece: 11962

<sup>4</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 4 December 2014), entry for Reginald Henry J. Griffin, Registration district: Chippenham, Inferred County: Wiltshire, Volume: 5a, Page: 73

<sup>5</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 4 December 2014), entry for Wilfred James F. Griffin, Registration district: Chippenham, Inferred County: Wiltshire, Volume: 5a, Page: 77

<sup>6</sup> "1911 England, Wales & Scotland Census," entry for Gilbert W. F. Griffin

<sup>7</sup> "England & Wales, FreeBMD Birth Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 4 December 2014), entry for Gertrude Kate S. Griffin, Registration district: Chippenham, Inferred County: Wiltshire, Volume: 5a, Page: 79

<sup>8</sup> "1911 England, Wales & Scotland Census," entry for Gilbert W. F. Griffin

<sup>9</sup> "1911 England, Wales & Scotland Census," entry for Gilbert W. F. Griffin

<sup>10</sup> Unless otherwise specified, all information about his army service come from "British Army Service Records 1914-1920," entry for Gilbert William Frank Griffin

<sup>11</sup> "The Long, Long Trail: The British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918: How men joined the British Army," (<http://www.1914-1918.net/recruitment.htm>; accessed 7 March 2015)

<sup>12</sup> "The Wartime Memories Project - The Great War: 1/5th Battalion The South Lancashire Regiment (Prince of Wales's Volunteers)," (<http://www.wartimemoriesproject.com/greatwar/allied/southlancashireregiment5-gw.php>; accessed 7 March 2015)

<sup>13</sup> "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk); accessed 4 December 2014), entry for Wilfred Frederick James Griffin

<sup>14</sup> "Commonwealth War Graves Commission," ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org); accessed 3 Decemer 2014), entry for Griffin, G.W.F.

<sup>15</sup> "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Library and Archives Canada, (records accessed 2013 & 2014), Record Group 9, series IIC10, volume 4556, Record number 506

<sup>16</sup> "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 19 January 2015), entry for Gilbert William Frank Griffin

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- <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=FINN&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=FINN&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G); accessed 15 December 2014)
- <sup>18</sup> "Pernes British Military Cemetery" *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/11600/PERNES%20BRITISH%20CEMETERY>; accessed 13 January 2015)
- <sup>19</sup> "British Army Service Records 1914-1920," entry for Gilbert William Frank Griffin. Articles included also "A. F. E 511", which may have been an Army Form E 511 "Discharge Certificate for a Soldier of the Territorial Force."
- <sup>20</sup> "1911 England, Wales & Scotland Census," entry for Gilbert W. F. Griffin
- <sup>21</sup> "England & Wales, Marriage Index, 1916-2005," Ancestry ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 4 December 2014), entry for Reginald H J Griffin, Registration district: Easthampstead, Inferred County: Berkshire, Volume Number: 2c, Page Number: 1193
- <sup>22</sup> "England & Wales deaths 1837-2007," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk); accessed 4 December 2014), entry for Reginald H. J. Griffin, District: Swindon, County: Wiltshire, Volume: 7C, Page: 548
- <sup>23</sup> "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," Ancestry ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk); accessed 26 November 2014), entry for Gilbert William Frank Griffin