

## **Private Robert Wilfred Prior©**

**Regimental number: 47194**

**Canadian Corps Cyclist Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force**

**born: probably 27 February 1894 – died: 24 January 1919**

Private Robert Wilfred Prior (known as Wilfred) was probably born Wilfred Ransley<sup>1</sup> on 27 February 1894 in Marylebone, Middlesex,<sup>2</sup> to unknown parents.<sup>3</sup> He was adopted by Jane and John Prior sometime prior to the spring of 1901, when he was seven years old.<sup>4</sup> He appears to have had one sister—Louisa Jane Ransley, born in 1886 in St Mary's, Romney Marsh in Kent.<sup>5</sup> She had also been living with the Priors since at least the age of four.<sup>6</sup> Wilfred maintained the use of his birth surname until at least 1911.

His adoptive parents—Jane and John Prior—were married in 1871 in Romney Marsh and had six children: twins, Mary Ann<sup>7</sup> and Sarah Jane (born in 1871),<sup>8</sup> Fanny Elizabeth Martha (born in 1874),<sup>9</sup> John Edward (born in 1877),<sup>10</sup> William Henry (born in 1881)<sup>11</sup> and Hannah (born in 1882).<sup>12</sup> Sadly, they lost three children<sup>13</sup> in the first year of life: Mary Ann,<sup>14</sup> William Henry<sup>15</sup> and Hannah.<sup>16</sup>

At some point, Wilfred began using the family name Prior. On 11 January 1915 he enlisted as Robert Wilfred Prior in the Canadian Expeditionary Force at Sling Planation in the Salisbury Plain.<sup>17</sup> According to his attestation, he was 21 years old but he was, in fact, only 19—just over a month shy of his 20th birthday. He was a coppersmith, 5' 7" tall and had a medium complexion, grey eyes and dark brown hair. For reasons that are not clear, Wilfred served with the Canadian Corps Cyclist Battalion, instead of the British forces.

The Canadian Expeditionary Force used bicycles extensively in the Great War. Members of the cyclist companies received in-depth training in weapons, signalling and topography techniques, range-finding and tactics. As a result of the static nature of the war in the first years, cyclists became more involved in traffic control, sapping and mining, trench guide, listening posts, battalion runners and despatch riding duties. In May 1916, the Overseas Divisional Cyclists were disbanded and the four Divisional Cyclist Companies combined to form the Canadian Corps Cyclist Battalion. The cyclists played an important role towards the end of the war, as their initial training came into "constant use in forming the vital links between the Infantry and Cavalry and keeping in constant touch with the retreating enemy."<sup>18</sup>

This work the cyclists performed at the end of the war was more dangerous,<sup>19</sup> yet Wilfred survived all the military action. He enlisted early in the war and survived to the end, only to be killed in a tragic accident two months after the end of the war.

In January 1919, Wilfred's battalion was stationed in Endenich, on the outskirts of Bonn, Germany. Soldiers were involved primarily in physical training and drills. The war diary noted that on 24 January 1919 "Pte R. W. Prior 'A' Coy accidentally killed by streetcar at 14.15 hours."<sup>20</sup> In fact, he was dead when admitted to No.1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 24 January.<sup>21</sup> On that day, he and a comrade had gone into Bonn.

While with a comrade proceeding along Thomas Strasse, Bonn, and when about 100 yards from the Station, the train that they wished to go to Cologne with came along; the comrade jumped on the first car and Private Prior, in attempting to catch the rear one, slipped and fell under the car. On examination, it was found that he had

sustained a fractured skull and a compound fracture of the left leg, death following almost immediately. A Court of Inquiry, convened to investigate his death, is of the opinion that it was wholly accidental, and that no blame can be attached to any person or persons.<sup>22</sup>

Wilfred was buried two days later in Popplesdorfer Cemetery (Grave 6, Plot B, Row A) with the Canadian chaplain W. Fisher presiding.<sup>23</sup> 'A' Company supplied a firing party and mourners.<sup>24</sup> His mother, who was his next of kin and was living at The Laurels 168 Tonbridge Road, Maidstone, Kent, was notified of his death.

Sometime later, his body was exhumed and interred in Brussels Town Cemetery (Grave Reference: Plot X, Row 11, Grave 8).<sup>25</sup>

Wilfred's sister Louisa probably married Frederick Woods in 1904 and, in 1911, was living in Maidstone with her husband and three children.<sup>26</sup> His father may have died in 1923<sup>27</sup> and his mother ten years later.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 2 January 2017), entry for Jane Prior, Registration district: Maidstone, Sub-registration district: Maidstone, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 16, Household schedule number: 766, Piece: 157, Folio: 23, Page: 48

<sup>2</sup> "GRO online index," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 January 2017) entry for Ransley, Wilfred, Volume 01A, Page 565. This index says he was born in the 1st Quarter of 1894. His Canadian Expeditionary Force attestation form indicates that he was born on 27 February 1873. A birth in 1894 is consistent with the age information provided in the 1901 and 1911 census records.

<sup>3</sup> The GRO online index of his birth suggests that he was illegitimate, since no mother's name is given.

<sup>4</sup> "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 2 January 2017), entry for Jane Prior

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*; "GRO online index," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 January 2017) entry for Ransley, Louisa Jane, Volume 02A, Page 1057

<sup>6</sup> "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 27 January 2017), entry for Jane Peros [*sic*], Registration district: Maidstone, Sub-registration district: East Maidstone, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 14, Piece: 690, Folio: 83, Page: 41

<sup>7</sup> "GRO online index," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 January 2017) entry for Prior, Mary Ann, Volume 02A, Page 877

<sup>8</sup> "GRO online index," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 January 2017) entry for Prior, Sarah Jane, Volume 02A, Page 876

<sup>9</sup> "GRO online index," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 January 2017) entry for Prior, Fanny Elizabeth Martha, Volume 02A, Page 933

<sup>10</sup> "GRO online index," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 January 2017) entry for Prior, John Edward, Volume 02A, Page 995

<sup>11</sup> "GRO online index," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 January 2017) entry for Prior, William Henry, Volume 02A, Page 1013

<sup>12</sup> "GRO online index," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 2 January 2017) entry for Prior, Hannah, Volume 02A, Page 1031

<sup>13</sup> "1911 England, Wales & Scotland Census," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 2 January 2017), entry for Jane Prior, Registration district: Maidstone, Registration district number: 51, Sub-district: Bakewell, Enumeration district: 25, Sub-district: Maidstone, Household schedule number: 3, Census reference: RG14PN4152 RG78PN161 RD51 SD3 ED25 SN136, Piece: 4152

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- <sup>14</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 2 January 2017), entry for Mary Ann Prior, Registration district: Romney Marsh, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 523
- <sup>15</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 2 January 2017), entry for William Henry Prior, Registration district: Romney Marsh, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 587
- <sup>16</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 2 January 2017), entry for Hannah Prior, Registration district: Romney Marsh, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 588
- <sup>17</sup> Sling Planation was initially an annexe to Bulford Camp, in the Salisbury Plain and got its name from the nearby woods. In 1916, Sling Plantation was taken over by the New Zealand troops and later Canadian troops. The word "Plantation" was then dropped from the title and it became Sling Camp. "Sling Camp," *Wikipedia* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sling\\_Camp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sling_Camp): accessed 4 January 2017)
- <sup>18</sup> "Canadian "Cyclist Battalion" in The Great War," *Canada at War* (<http://www.canadaatwar.ca/forums/showthread.php?t=2673>: accessed 2 January 2017)
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> "War Diaries - Canadian Corps Cyclist Battalion," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca>: accessed 5 January 2017), File: RG9-III-D-3. Volume: 4956 File Part 1=1916/05/01-1917/12/31; 2=1918/01/01-1919/03/31. File number: 499, Microfilm reel: T-10773
- <sup>21</sup> "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* ([www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca): accessed 16 December 2016), entry for Prior, R. W.
- <sup>22</sup> "Canada, War Graves Registers (Circumstances of Casualty), 1914–1948," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 1 January 2017), entry for Robert Wilfred Prior, Service number: 47194
- <sup>23</sup> "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* ([www.bifhsgo.ca](http://www.bifhsgo.ca): accessed 16 December 2016), entry for Prior, R. W.
- <sup>24</sup> "War Diaries - Canadian Corps Cyclist Battalion," *Library and Archives Canada* (<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca>: accessed 5 January 2017)
- <sup>25</sup> "Canada, War Graves Registers (Circumstances of Casualty), 1914–1948," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 1 January 2017), entry for Robert Wilfred Prior
- <sup>26</sup> "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 5 January 2017), entry for Laura Jane Woods, Registration district: Maidstone, Registration district number: 51, Sub-registration district: Maidstone, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 11, Household schedule number: 293, Piece: 4138
- <sup>27</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 4 January 2017), entry for John Prior, Registration district: Maidstone, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 896
- <sup>28</sup> "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 4 January 2017), entry for Jane Prior, Registration district: Maidstone, Inferred county: Kent, Volume: 2a, Page: 1038