

Sergeant William Maxfield MM©
Regimental number: 38012
Royal Horse Artillery and Royal Field Artillery

born: 25 February 1888–died: 25 April 1918

Sergeant William Maxfield was born on 25 February 1888¹ in Cardiff, Glamorganshire, Wales, the son of Sydney and Mary Maxfield. Both parents were from Monmouthshire—Sydney was born in Chepstow on 20 October 1852² and Mary about 20 miles away in Newport in about 1859.³ Sydney had married Mary Elizabeth Gibbons in Newport in 1879⁴ and they subsequently had seven children—three of whom died in infancy:

- Sydney (born in 1879, but died shortly thereafter),⁵
- George Aubrey (born in 1882),⁶
- Fred (born in 1886, but died the same year),⁷
- William,
- Gertrude Annie (born on 1 Nov 1891)⁸
- James (born in 1893, but died a few months later)⁹ and
- James (born 1 November 1894).¹⁰

Before their marriage, Sydney was working for the Monmouthshire Railway and Canal Company (MR & CC).¹¹ When its business declined, it sold the rights to its network to the Great Western Railway (GWR) in 1875.¹² The previous year, Sydney, a fireman, had left MR & CC to join the GWR.¹³

Two years after their marriage, Sydney and Mary were living at 8 Canal Parade in Newport.¹⁴ Their first child had died, but three children followed and, the year William was born, his father was promoted to an engine turner. In 1890, he was promoted to 3rd Class Engineman, and the following year the family had moved to 19 Lower George Street in Newport.¹⁵

In late 1896 Sydney's wife died, leaving Sydney with four children 10 years of age and under. In December 1897, Sydney had to make a sacrifice for his family:

[He] declined promotion to 2nd Class Engineman with removal to Didcot [about 100 miles away] on account of domestic difficulties. Allowed by Mr. Dean to remain at Newport D^k St. as a permanent 3rd Class Engineman on the distinct understanding that he thereby forfeits all claim to further promotion or advance of wages.

Since the family continued to live in Newport, both William and his brother James attended the local Bolt Street Boys School. William enrolled in 1897¹⁶ and James in 1904.¹⁷ Gertrude attended the Alexandra Girl's School, enrolling in 1899.¹⁸

In 1901, Sydney, George and William were boarding with the family of James Collins at 3 Canal Parade—just down the road from their house in 1881. They were living next door to Sydney's sister, Sarah Jane,¹⁹ who was married to Harry Andrew Day.²⁰ Sydney's parents, William and Mary, and William's brother James were boarding with the Day family. It is not known where Gertrude was that year.

During his employment with GWR, William's father's form and colour vision were checked regularly. In 1899, he had an eye inflammation as a result of receiving coal dust in his eye from a passing train. Although his eyesight remained normal, the death of his wife had taken a toll on him.

In November 1904, at his vision check the examiner [Mr. James] reported that Sydney was a

... [v]ery dissipated man. Says he lost his wife 8 years. Promised to be more careful in the future. ... Maxfield states that he was not very well on the day Mr. James saw him at Newport. I told him if he did not keep away from the public houses, serious notice should be taken of the matter. He promised me he would do so, I told him a sharp watch would be kept on his movements.

Sydney was allowed to remain in the employ of the GRW and things improved for a few years—Sydney was in better health when he was examined in November 1907—but it did not last. On 14 January 1908, the doctor reported

I beg to say I have again had this man before me. I have also read through Maxfield's medical history sheet. He appears to have disregarded the warning I gave him on 22nd Jan 1906 as to his intemperate habits and losing time. I must also add that although he wears a truss on his Inguinal Hernia, this is useless. The instrument is worn out and does not control the abdominal ring. I am of [the] opinion that Maxfield at his examination today is not as sober as he might be. I must therefore repeat what I stated in my former letter that he is not fit to be retained in the service of the G.W.R. Co.

Sydney was let go. He was awarded four weeks pay in lieu of notice and a pension from February 1908. Sadly, on 10 July 1908, Sydney died, leaving his three children as orphans.

After their father's death, the Maxfield siblings split up. William had enlisted in the army in 1905 and served with the 3rd Battalion of the South Wales Borderers. When he signed up, he was 5' 5" tall and had a fresh complexion, grey eyes and brown hair. By July 1905, he had joined the regular army and was with the Royal Field Artillery (RFA).

In 1911, George, an iron ore worker, was boarding with William Burgess and his wife at 7 Raglan Street. Gertrude was probably a domestic servant in the Davies' home on Fair Oak Road in Roath Park. James was still a boarder with his aunt and uncle, Harry and Jane Day, and living at 14 Clytha Crescent in Newport.

William joined up to serve in the British Expeditionary Force in about August 1914²¹ in Brecon, Breconshire, Wales²² and went overseas on 19 August 1914.²³ He was serving with the 6th Battery, 40th Brigade of the RFA when he was fatally wounded. He was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 25 April 1918 with shrapnel wounds to his right side that penetrated his abdomen. He died the same day and was buried on 27 April in Pernes Military Cemetery (Row A, Plot 2, Grave 6) with the Canadian chaplain G. C. d'Easum presiding.²⁴

Pernes British Military Cemetery was only set up in April 1918 when No. 1 and No. 4 CCCSs came to Pernes, driven back by the German advance. William was one of 122 soldiers admitted on 25 April and one of 46 soldiers to die at the station that month.²⁵

William's sister Gertrude and brother George received the monies owing to him from the army upon his death and Gertrude requested the following inscription for William's gravestone:

EVER REMEMBERED BY
GERT, GEORGE & JAMES²⁶

William was awarded the Military Medal in 1916²⁷—a medal awarded to Other Ranks (non-officers) of the British Army and Commonwealth Forces for gallantry and devotion to duty when under fire in battle on land.²⁸ In addition, he was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914–15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).

William's two surviving brothers both served in the Great War. George was mobilized in Manchester in August 1916, at the age of 34; he joined the 8th Battalion of the Manchester Regiment as a private (regimental number 6091).²⁹ At the time he was an iron ore barker. It is not clear if he ever served overseas. After being ordered to go overseas, he disappeared and was absent without leave until surrendering on 25 November 1918. He subsequently served 56 days in detention, was released on 20 January 1919 and was demobilized in March 1919. George may have married sometime after the war,³⁰ but no record of a marriage could be found. He died in early 1925.³¹

Like his father before him, James worked for the Great Western Railway. He joined in August 1912 as an engine cleaner. Just over a year later, he was promoted to a fireman.³² He left the GRW in September 1914 to enlist in the army and he served as a private (regimental number 16695) in the South Wales Borderers.³³ He was discharged on 15 April 1919, with a disability as a result of having had malaria, and returned to the GWR. On 6 August 1923, he married Prudence Olive Morgan in Blaenavon,³⁴ about 30 miles from Newport. Sadly, Prudence died in 1930.³⁵ James remarried; he wed Agnes Maude Francis on 7 August 1932.³⁶ In 1930, James became an engine driver and stayed one until the 1950s. James and Agnes probably had two children—Donald J., born in 1933,³⁷ and Derek J., born on 15 July 1938.³⁸ In 1939, the family was living at 22 William Street in Newport.³⁹ James died in 1972.⁴⁰ He was William's last surviving sibling.

During the war (in 1916), Gertrude married Richard W. Barnes in Newport⁴¹ and had at least three children—Richard, born in late 1917 or early 1918,⁴² William J. (probably named after his late uncle) on 2 November 1919⁴³ and Sydney, born on 5 September 1922.⁴⁴ In 1939, Gertrude was living at 4 Admiral Street in Newport with her husband and two sons.⁴⁵ She died in Newport in 1941.⁴⁶

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¹ "National School Admission Registers & Log-books 1870–1914," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 29 November 2019), entry for William Maxfield, Book type: Admissions, Archive reference: GEA260/11

² "UK, Railway Employment Records, 1833–1956," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 November 2019), entry for Sidney [*sic*] Maxfield

³ "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 20 November 2019), entry for William Maxfield, Registration district: Newport, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 13, Piece: 4373, Folio: 19, Page: 32

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- ⁴ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 20 November 2019), entry for Sydney Maxfield, Registration district: Newport, Inferred county: Monmouthshire, Volume: 11a, Page: 217
- ⁵ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 20 November 2019), entry for Maxfield, Sydney, Registration district: Newport, Volume 11A, Page 187; “England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 November 2019), entry for Sydney Maxfield, Registration district: Newport, Inferred county: Monmouthshire, Volume: 11a, Page: 93
- ⁶ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 20 November 2019), entry for Maxfield, George Aubrey, Registration district: Newport Mon, Volume 11A, Page 197
- ⁷ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 20 November 2019), entry for Maxfield, Fred, Registration district: Cardiff, Volume 11A, Page 283; “England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 November 2019), entry for Fred Maxfield, Registration district: Cardiff, Inferred county: Monmouthshire, Volume: 11a, Page: 199
- ⁸ “1939 England and Wales Register,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 November 2019), entry for Gertrude G. Barnes, Schedule number: 371, Sub-schedule number: 2, Enumeration district: XNNF, Registration district: 587-2
- ⁹ “GRO online index–birth,” *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/>: accessed 20 November 2019), entry for Maxfield, James, Registration district: Newport Mon, Volume 11A, Page 218; “England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 28 November 2019), entry for James Maxfield, Registration district: Newport, Inferred county: Monmouthshire, Volume: 11a, Page: 137
- ¹⁰ “1939 England and Wales Register,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 November 2019), entry for James Maxfield, Schedule number: 421, Sub-schedule Number: 1, Enumeration district: XNNH
- ¹¹ “UK, Railway Employment Records, 1833–1956,” entry for Sidney [*sic*] Maxfield, Unless otherwise noted, all information about Sydney’s railway career comes from this source.
- ¹² “Monmouthshire Railway and Canal Company,” *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monmouthshire_Railway_and_Canal_Company: accessed 28 November 2019)
- ¹³ “UK, Railway Employment Records, 1833–1956,” entry for Sidney [*sic*] Maxfield.
- ¹⁴ “1881 England Census,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 27 January 2019), entry for Sidney [*sic*] Maxfield, Registration district: Elham, Sub-registration district: Hythe, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 9, Piece: 1014, Folio: 62, Page: 19
- ¹⁵ “1891 England Census,” entry for William Maxfield
- ¹⁶ “National School Admission Registers & Log-books 1870–1914,” entry for James Maxfield
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ “National School Admission Registers & Log-books 1870–1914,” *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 29 November 2019), entry for Gertrude Maxfield, Book type: Admissions, Archive reference: GEA/253/6
- ¹⁹ “Gwent Non-conformist Baptisms,” *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 2 December 2019), entry for Sarah Jane Maxfield
- ²⁰ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 20 November 2019), entry for Sarah Jane Marfield [*sic*], Registration district: Cardiff, Inferred county: Glamorgan, Volume: 11a, Page: 359
- ²¹ Based on “War Gratuity Calculator” (<https://wargratiuity.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/gratuity-calculator/>: accessed 18 May 2017); “UK, Army Registers of Soldiers’ Effects, 1901–1929,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 20 November 2019), entry for MM William Maxfield [*sic*]
- ²² “UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 21 November 2019), entry for William Maxfield

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- ²³ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 20 November 2019), entry for William Maxfield
- ²⁴ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 20 November 2019), entry for Maxfield W.
- ²⁵ "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&SortSpec=score+desc&Language=eng&ShowForm=hide&SearchIn_1=mikanNumber&SearchInText_1=2005082&Operator_1=AND&SearchIn_2=&SearchInText_2=&Operator_2=AND&SearchIn_3=&SearchInText_3=&Level=&MaterialDateOperator=after&MaterialDate=&DigitalImages=1&Source=&ResultCount=10: accessed 28 March 2018)
- ²⁶ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 20 November 2019), entry for Maxfield, William, Service number: 38012
- ²⁷ *Supplement to The Edinburgh Gazette*, entry for William Maxfield, Publication date: 20 November 1916, Issue: 13014, Page: 2155
- ²⁸ "A Guide to British Awards for Gallantry or Meritorious Service in WW1," *The Great War 1914–1918* (<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/medals/ww1-gallantry-awards.htm#MM>: accessed 20 August 2016)
- ²⁹ "British Army WWI Service Records, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 November 2019), entry for George Maxfield. Unless otherwise noted, all information about George's military career comes from this source.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 November 2019), entry for George Maxfield, Registration district: Newport, Inferred county: Monmouthshire, Volume: 11a, Page: 269
- ³² "UK, Railway Employment Records, 1833-1956," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 20 November 2019), entry for James Maxfield. Unless otherwise specified, all information about James' career with the Great Western Railway comes from this source.
- ³³ "British Army WWI Service Records, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 30 November 2019), entry for James Maxfield. Unless otherwise specified, all information about James' military career comes from this source.
- ³⁴ "Monmouthshire Marriages And Banns," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 30 November 2019), entry for James Maxfield, County: Monmouthshire, Page: 30
- ³⁵ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 November 2019), entry for Prudence O. Maxfield, Registration district: Newport, Inferred county: Monmouthshire, Volume: 11a, Page: 248
- ³⁶ "Monmouthshire Marriages And Banns," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 30 November 2019), entry for James Maxfield, County: Monmouthshire, Page: 168
- ³⁷ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 November 2019), entry for Donald J. Maxfield, Registration district: Newport M, Inferred county: Monmouthshire, Volume: 11a, Page: 322
- ³⁸ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 November 2019), entry for Derek F. Maxfield, Registration district: Newport M, Inferred county: Monmouthshire, Volume: 11a, Page: 274; "1939 England and Wales Register," for James Maxfield
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁰ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 November 2019), entry for James Maxfield, Registration district: Caerleon, Inferred county: Monmouthshire, Volume: 8c, Page: 386
- ⁴¹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916–2005," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 November 2019), entry for Gertrude Maxfield, Registration district: Newport Market, Inferred county: Glamorgan, Gwent, Monmouthshire, Volume: 11a, Page: 384

⁴² “England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index 1916–2007,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 November 2019), entry for Richard Barnes, Registration district: Newport M, Inferred county: Monmouthshire, Volume: 11a, Page: 500

⁴³ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index 1916–2007,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 November 2019), entry for William J. Barnes, Registration district: Newport M, Inferred county: Glamorganshire, Volume: 11a, Page: 560; “1939 England and Wales Register,” entry for Gertrude G. Barnes

⁴⁴ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index 1916–2007,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 November 2019), entry for Sydney G. Barnes, Registration district: Newport M, Inferred county: Glamorganshire, Volume: 11a, Page: 406; “1939 England and Wales Register,” entry for Gertrude G. Barnes

⁴⁵ “1939 England and Wales Register,” entry for Gertrude G. Barnes

⁴⁶ “England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007,” *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 29 November 2019), entry for Gertrude A. Barnes, Registration district: Newport, Inferred county: Gwent, Volume: 11a, Page: 429