

Sapper George Hill©
Regimental number: 137885
237th Field Company, Royal Engineers

born: 1887–died: 1916

George Hill was born in 1887¹ in Swallowfield, Berkshire, the second son of William and Louisa Hill.²

William was a gardener, born in Liverpool, Lancashire, around 1855.³ He married Louisa (née Watts) in Wokingham, Berkshire, in 1883.⁴ She was born in Wokingham in 1853,⁵ the daughter of Charles Watts, a carpenter, and Sarah.⁶ Louisa was a domestic parlourmaid in a boarding school before she was married.⁷

William and Louisa had four children, but the family experienced much tragedy. Their first-born, Mary Ann, was born in 1884,⁸ but only lived two years.⁹ Their second child, son Charles, was born in 1885 and was working as a carpenter in 1901,¹⁰ but he also died all too young in 1903,¹¹ at age 18.

George was still living at home in Swallowfield with his parents and younger sister Daisy Ethel (born about 1890) in 1911, at age 23.¹² He was working as a carpenter, in the footsteps of his maternal grandfather and his older brother.

In November 1915, George enlisted in the Royal Engineers in Reading, Berkshire, one of several hundred new recruits listed in the local newspaper.¹³ He was assigned to the 237th Field Company,¹⁴ which was made up of recruits from Reading and formed part of the 41st Division.¹⁵

The 41st Division was raised at Aldershot in Southern England in September 1915, and following training was inspected by King George V on 26 April 1916.¹⁶ The units of the division moved to France between 1 and 6 May 1916 and by 8 May had concentrated between Hazebrouck and Bailleul.¹⁷ The 237th Field Company settled in Dou Dou Farm near Bailleul on 16 May 1916 and remained there for several months.¹⁸

The work consisted of repairing trenches, digging gun emplacements and dug-outs, and constructing dummy trenches for enemy air observation.¹⁹ On 20 July, there were no reports of activity or casualties,²⁰ but the local Reading newspaper reported on 29 July that Sapper G. Hill was “seriously wounded last week in the head by a shell” and died of his wounds. (It also recorded that he was engaged to be married to a Miss Crocker, of Spencers Wood.)²¹ He died on 20 July 1916 at No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station in Bailleul.²²

A casualty clearing station was a military medical unit behind the front lines, usually located near transportation. Casualties who did not soon die or could not be adequately treated in the CCS were stabilized before being transported to a field or military hospital.²³

Sapper Hill was buried in the Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord, Reference II. F. 15.²⁴ The inscription on his headstone reads:

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN MOTHER, DAD & SISTER

The cemetery lies in the east end of the town of Bailleul, in the Nord department of the Hauts-de-France region, and contains the remains of 4,344 soldiers from the two world wars.

Sapper Hill was awarded posthumously the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918).²⁵

George's sister Daisy Ethel married Lionel Latham in Wokingham in April 1917,²⁶ and they had two children: Georgina Violet in 1918²⁷ and William John in 1921.²⁸ They were living at the same address as Daisy's parents in 1929, in Red Lodge, Swallowfield, but in 1930 and 1931 it is only Lionel that is recorded as living with Daisy's parents.²⁹ In 1931, Lionel remarried to Eveline Knight,³⁰ and in 1932 Lionel and Eveline were living with Daisy's parents in Red Lodge.³¹ This strongly suggests that Daisy died in 1930, possibly in London, at age 40.³²

George's parents thus had the misfortune of seeing all four of their children predecease them. Louisa died in 1934, at age 80.³³ William's death record has not been found, but he was still living at Red Lodge in 1934, age 80.³⁴

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¹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2021), entry for George Hill, Registration district: Wokingham, Inferred county: Berkshire, Volume: 2c, Page: 388

² "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2021), entry for George Hill, Registration district: Wokingham, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 13, Piece: 1000, Folio: 103, Page: 15

³ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2021), entry for William Hill, Registration district number: 122, Sub-registration district: Wokingham, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 09, Piece: 6622

⁴ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 13 March 2021), entry for William Hill, Registration district: Wokingham, Inferred county: Berkshire, Volume: 2c, Page: 844

⁵ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2021), entry for Louisa Watts, Registration district: Wokingham, Inferred county: Berkshire, Volume: 2c, Page: 294

⁶ "1861 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2021), entry for Charles Watts, Registration district: Hartley Wintney, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 6b, Household schedule no: 42, Piece: 707, Folio: 84, Page: 6

⁷ "1881 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2021), entry for Louisa Watts, Registration district: Hartley Wintney, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 8, Piece: 1253, Folio: 116, Page: 22

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⁹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2021), entry for Mary Ann Hill, Inferred county: Berkshire, Volume: 2c, Page: 212

¹⁰ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2021), entry for Charles Hill, Registration district: Wokingham, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 12, Piece: 1155, Folio: 136, Page: 16

¹¹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2021), entry for Charles Hill, Inferred county: Berkshire, Volume: 2c, Page: 228

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- ¹² "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2021), entry for George Hill, Registration district number: 122, Sub-registration district: Wokingham, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 09, Piece: 6622
- ¹³ "Recruiting in Reading," *Reading Mercury*, 20 November 1915, page 2 (<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000369/19151120/071/0002>: accessed 14 March 2021), search for George Hill
- ¹⁴ "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2021), entry for George Hill
- ¹⁵ "The Wartime Memories Project," (<https://wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/allied/companyre.php?pid=11927>: accessed 15 March 2021), entry for 237th (Reading) Field Company, Royal Engineers
- ¹⁶ "41st Division," *The Long, Long Trail* (<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/order-of-battle-of-divisions/41st-division/>: accessed 15 March 2021)
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ "UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 16 March 2021), entry for Royal Engineers, 41st Division, Sub-unit: 237th Field Company, Piece description: Piece 2626, page 465
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, page 469
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, page 484
- ²¹ "Death of Sapper G. Hill, Royal Engineers," *Reading Mercury*, 29 July 1916 (<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000369/19160729/104/0006>: accessed 16 March 2021)
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- ²⁵ "UK British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 16 March 2021), entry for George Hill
- ²⁶ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916–2005," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 16 March 2021), entry for Daisy E Hill, Registration district: Wokingham, Inferred county: Berkshire, Volume: 2e, Page: 789
- ²⁷ "England & Wales Civil Registration Birth Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 March 2021), entry for Georgina V Latham, Registration district: Wokingham, Inferred county: Berkshire, Volume: 2c, Page: 642
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³⁴ "Berkshire, England, Electoral Registers, 1840–1965," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 12 March 2021), entry for William Hill, 1934