

Private William Anthony Machin

On the 18th November 1916, British Commander in Chief Sir Douglas Haig called a halt to his offensive near the Somme River in north-western France, ending the epic Battle of the Somme after more than four months of bloody conflict. There was, however no real let up in the hostilities. Sniping, shelling and trench raids continued.

William's grandfather, Samuel Machin, came from Derbyshire. The 1861 census, however, recorded him living in Pinxton, near Mansfield, Nottinghamshire as an 'inn keeper' with his wife Martha (nee Clarke),ⁱ four sons, and a daughter and employing a general servant Mary Adams.



Figure 1: An early photograph of Wharf Road, Old Pinxton

Francis Thomas Machin, known as Frank (Williams father), was the second child of Samuel and Martha and was born in the winter months of 1853 in Crich, Derbyshire.ⁱⁱ At the age of seventeen, Frank had become an 'apprentice druggist.'ⁱⁱⁱ By the spring of 1879, at the age of 26, he married Rebecca Elizabeth Smith in St Mary Magdalene Church in Sutton-in-Ashfield near Mansfield in Nottinghamshire.

For the first few years of their marriage, the couple lived with Rebecca's father, William Smith, a farmer of 14 acres. The farm house, Cowpasture Cottage was located in Sutton-in-Ashfield. This is where their six children were born and spent their early childhood. Their six children were: Mary Weston

(born 6th March 1881), Frank Smith (born 22nd June 1881); Margaret Eleanor (born in early 1883); Alice Evelyn (born 1st October 1884) and twins, Kate Elizabeth and William Anthony, born in the spring of 1887.^{iv} Their father, Frank, was a commercial traveller for Roberts, Mart & Co Ltd, a paper manufacturers based in Leeds, and represented the firm's interests in the Midlands.^v This is most likely the reason for the move to Station Road, Knowle between 1887 and 1891. Rebecca's father, William, now retired from farming aged 79 years, went with them.^{vi} Frank eventually became a director of the company.

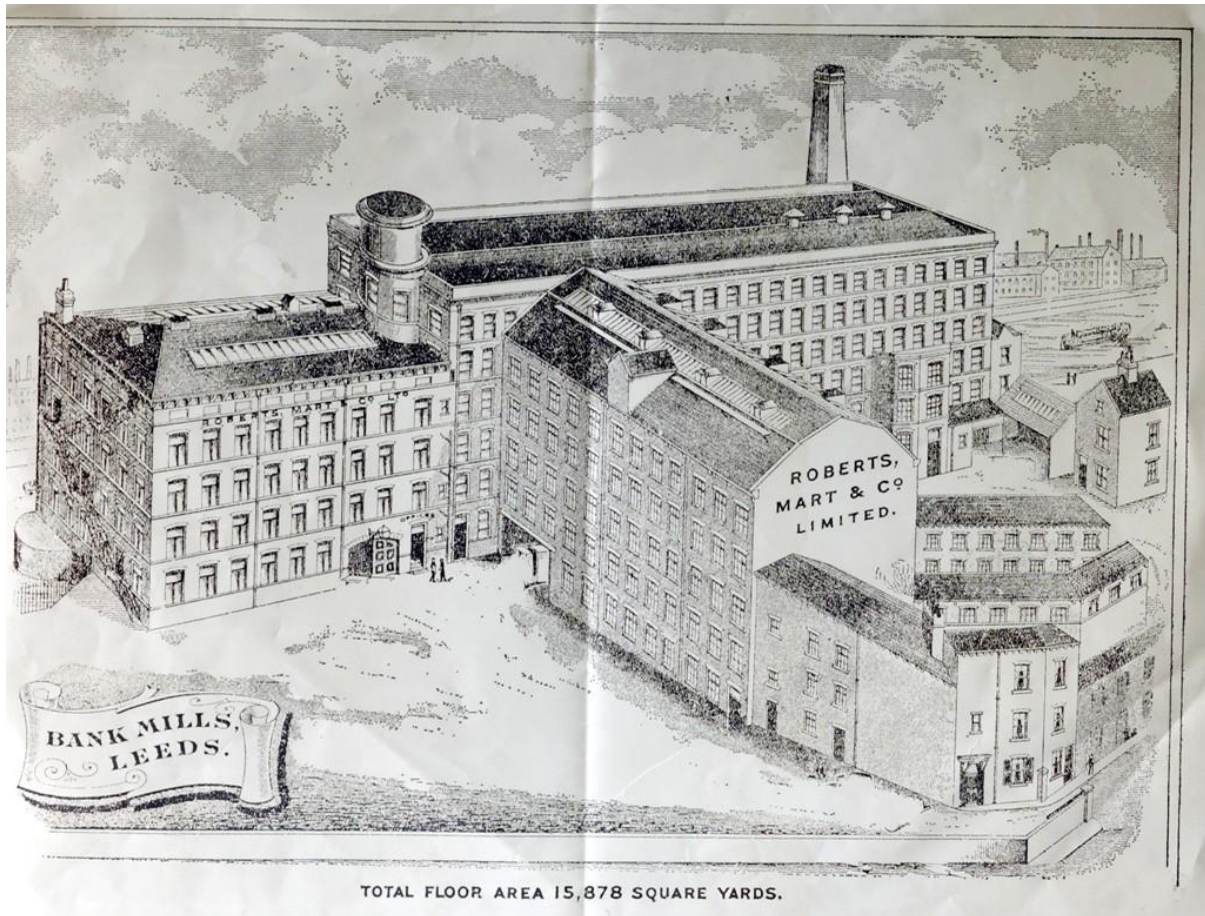


Figure 2; Roberts, Mart & Co Limited, Bank Mills, Leeds

From his childhood, Frank had a keen interest in animals and birds, and became a knowledgeable judge of dogs, canaries and British birds. He wrote a book 'The Flowers of the Orient' which became the standard work of the 'Oriental Frill' breed of pigeon with wide sales in Britain and America. Not only was he president of the 'Oriental Frill' Society but also the Columbarian Society (a society for pigeon fanciers that organised annual shows and awarded prizes for best in various categories).^{vii} He also gave his services to the Birmingham Agricultural Society and the Pigeon Society of that body. In addition he was president several times of Moseley Bowling Club and a member of Warwickshire

County Cricket Club and Moseley Rugby Football Club. Frank was taken an active interest in the Birmingham Liberal Club, was a Freemason and a member of the Midland Club.^{viii}

In 1896 Frank acquired the lease of land in Moseley on what was part of the Moseley Hall estate. Salisbury Road was created in 1896 and named after the Prime Minister of the time, the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury. Around 1897, Frank and Rebecca moved into their newly-built house, Glengarriff, No 59 on Salisbury Road.^{ix} The couple remained there until their respective deaths, Rebecca on 28th January 1929, leaving assets of £300 8s 0d (nearly £17,000 in today's money) and Frank in 1939, leaving assets worth £23,918 17s 2d, worth nearly one and a half million pounds in today's money.^x

Both Frank's sons, Frank junior and William, attended Solihull School. On leaving school Frank became a dental surgeon and William a 'commercial traveller for a paper manufacturer', quite likely the same firm that his father worked for.^{xi}

On 16th April 1915, William enlisted at Waldingham, Surrey, for the duration of the war, as a private, No 2035 in the 16th Battalion (Duchess of Cambridge's Own) Middlesex Regiment (16th Middlesex), also known as the Public Schools Battalion. A week later he was medically examined and vaccinated.^{xii} After a training period lasting until 16th November, William embarked for France with his battalion, and arrived in Boulogne on 17th November 1915. The battalion formed part of the 33rd Division concentrated near Morbecque^{xiii}



Figure 3: This is commonly believed to be a company of the Public Schools Battalion (16th Battalion, the Middlesex Regiment), opposite Beaumont Hamel prior to the Battle of the Somme, 1916.

On 25th February 1916, the 16th Middlesex left the Division and transferred to GHQ Troops before transferring again to the 86th Brigade, 28th Division, on 23rd April, moving to the Somme in the spring of 1916 in preparation for the 'Big Push'.

On the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the 16th Middlesex saw action in an attack on Hawthorn Ridge, Beaumont-Hamel. The battalion was reduced to a mere handful having lost 24 officers and 500 other ranks in the attack. The survivors of the 16th Middlesex, including William, moved back to billets in Englebelmer three days later. On 25th July, the 16th Middlesex were relieved from duty in the front line trenches and gradually moved north to the Ypres area from 30th July, proceeding to Camp "C" in the woods 3 miles east of Poperinghe. August and September were passed in the salient, in the front line trenches or in support or reserve. On 8th October the 16th Middlesex entrained once again for the Somme area, and, on arriving at Amiens, the units were marched to either Neuville or Daours. From these two villages the 86th Brigade moved, on the 13th October, to the neighbourhood of Mametz Wood. On 19th October the Brigade took over the front-line trenches relieving a battalion of the Berkshire Regiment in the Flers sector.^{xiv}

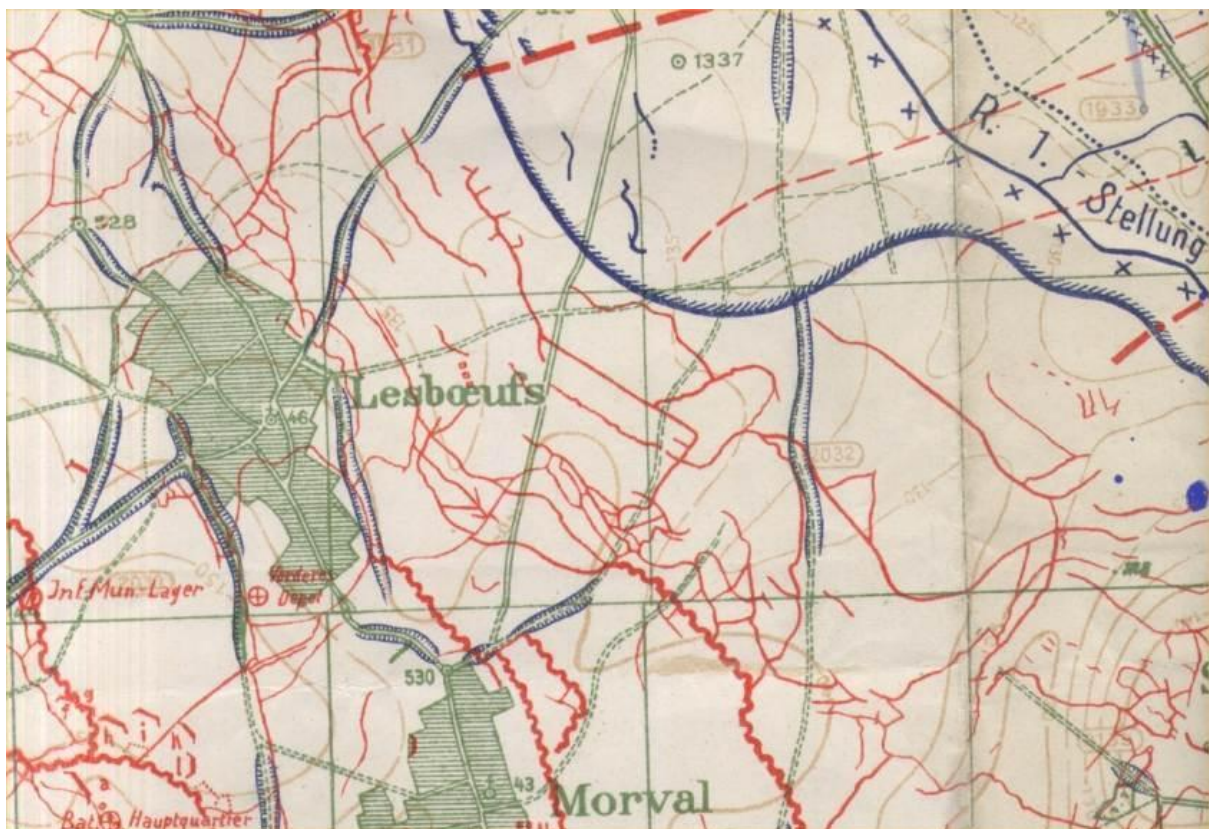


Figure 4: A map of the German trenches around Lesbœufs dated 16th November 1916. The British trenches are in red, the German trenches in blue

On the 18th November 1916, British Commander in Chief Sir Douglas Haig called a halt to his army's offensive, ending the epic Battle of the Somme after more than four months of bloody conflict. There was, however no real let up in the hostilities. Sniping, shelling and trench raids continued. The 16th Middlesex battalion were in the trenches near Lesbœufs from the 21st November. Three days later William's luck ran out. The regimental war diary for the 24th November 1916 simply reports: '1 other rank killed and 5 wounded.' The other rank killed was William.^{xv}

William is buried in the AIF Burial Ground near Flers. He is also commemorated at Solihull School (the memorial is now lost), St Mary's Church, Moseley, Moseley Ashfield Cricket Club and Birmingham Hall of Memory.



Figure 5:
 (left) Moseley Ashfield Cricket Club WW1 memorial
 (right) St Mary's Church, Moseley WW1 memorial
 (bottom left) AIF Burial Ground, near Flers

Frank's father received William's personal possessions from the officer in charge of records at Hounslow Barracks, consisting of: post cards; letters; 2

small photos; 6 paid cheques; 2 receipts; a certificate of Latin and a wallet. He left assets worth £262 19s 11d (about £20,600 in today's money) to his father to administer, dated 20th March 1917. Frank also applied for and received William's three medals, the 1914-15 Star, the British War medal 1914-18 and Allied Victory Medal.^{xvi}



Figure 3: The Manor, Burghill, Herefordshire

William's brother, qualified as a dental surgeon in 1905 and practised in Hereford. He also served in the Great War with the Royal Army Medical Corps obtaining the rank of temporary Lieutenant on 5th June 1916 and later attained the rank of Captain and temporary Major. Having survived the war he went on to marry Lucy Kathleen Vaughan in Hereford in 1922. They lived at the Manor House, Burghill, Herefordshire.^{xvii}

William's sister Mary married Ernest Jeavons, a managing director of a hardware company in 1917. They lived at 48 Reddings Road, Moseley and had a son, Peter, who was recorded on the 1939 register as a medical student.^{xviii}

Margaret Machin died in 1903, aged 20 years.^{xix}

Alice married Arnold William Steynor, a dentist, in 1908 and was recorded as living in Berwyn, St Peters Road, Malvern in 1939.^{xx}

William's twin sister Kate married George Herbert Banks, an agricultural auctioneer/farmer in 1909. In 1939 they lived at Hill House Farm, Martley in Worcestershire with their three children Joan, Honor and Thomas.^{xxi}

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Endnotes

- i Derbyshire marriages 1837-2008
- ii England & Wales births 1837-2006, 1853, Belper, 4/4, 7B, 382
1861 census
- iii 1871 census
- iv England & Wales births 1837-2006
1939 Register
- v *The Birmingham Post*, May 23rd 1939
- vi 1891 census
- vii *Birmingham Daily Post*, 1st January 1875
- viii See vi Ref Birmingham Post
- ix Solihull Heritage & Local Studies, 23rd May 2016
- x Historic inflation calculator
<http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/bills/article-1633409/Historic-inflation-calculator-value-money-changed-1900.html>
- xi 1911 census
- xii Attestation Record
- xiii 16th Middlesex Battalion, war time memory project
<http://www.wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/allied/regiment.php?pid=17600>
- xiv Middlesex Regiment on the Somme
<https://somme1916.wordpress.com/2015/12/16/middlesex-regiment-on-the-somme/>
Wyrall, Everard. New edition 2002 (First published 1926-1930). *Die-Hards in the Great War (Middlesex Regiment)*. Naval & Military Press, Uckfield, Chapter XXII, pp 164-175
Extracts from the book also available on Invision Zone.
<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?/topic/90076-soldier-of-the-16th-middlesex-regiment>
- xv 16th Battalion Middlesex Regiment, National Archives, Ref WO 95/2302/2
- xvi Probate records for England & Wales 1858-1959, 1917
- xvii Licentiates in Dental Surgery, Royal College of Surgeons, England Calendars, London 1975

London Gazette, 5th June 1915, Issue 29640, p 6325

Medal Index Cards

England & Wales marriages 1837-2008 , Hereford, 1922, 2/4, 6A, 1238

1939 Register

xviii England & Wales marriages 1837-2008 , Kings Norton, 1917, 4/4, 6D, 49
1939 Register

xix England & Wales deaths, Kings Norton, 1903, 4/4, 6C, 237

xx England & Wales marriages 1837-2008, Kings Norton, 1908, 2/4, 6C, 911
1939 register

xxi England & Wales marriages 1837-2008, Martley, 1909, 2/4, 6C, 371
1939 Register

Illustrations

Figure 1 South Normanton Photographic History

Figure 2 Roberts, Mart & Co Ltd
<http://www.roberts-mart.co.uk/about-us/history/>

Figure 3 The Public Schools Battalion 1916
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Public_Schools_Battalion_at_White_City_1916.jpg

Figure 4 Map of Lesboeufs
<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?/topic/91162-trench-map-of-lesboeufs-circa-26th-nov1916/>

Figure 5: Moseley Ashfield Cricket Club WW1 memorial
<https://twitter.com/moseleyashfield/status/661801304449277953>

Figure 6 The Manor, Burghill, Herefordshire
http://www.herefordtimes.com/homes/ofinterest/10182687.Large_rooms_in_spacious_Burghill_Manor/#gallery1