

# **William John Bryant**

## **Private 25411, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Bedfordshire Regiment**

**William John Bryant** was born in the July - September quarter of 1892, the son of Owen Bryant and his wife Sarah Jane Dover of Coleshill. His father, having been a coal-carter in 1891, then worked first as a garden labourer and by 1911 as a gardener. William John was the oldest child, being followed by Frederick George, two years his junior, and then Ada Margaret (1897), Winnie Mary (1899), Lilian Bertha (1902) and Daisy Janet (1904). Frederick George died in 1902 aged 7, leaving William as the family's only surviving son.

The 1911 Census showed 18 year-old William still living at home and employed as a grocer's shop assistant. The three youngest sisters, aged between 7 and 11, were still at school. The address was given only as Coleshill, but according to the 1910 Land Survey Owen Bryant was living at Romany Cottage.

Very little is known about William's military career or the circumstances of his death. According to *Soldiers Died in the Great War* William Bryant enlisted at Cheshunt, Hertfordshire and joined the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Bedfordshire Regiment, but no date is given.

This was initially a training battalion which, on the outbreak of war, moved to Felixstowe for duty with the garrison at Harwich. In July 1916 the battalion landed at Le Havre to serve as part of the 190<sup>th</sup> Brigade and the 63<sup>rd</sup> (Royal Naval) Division.

The *War Diary*<sup>1</sup> shows the battalion taking very heavy casualties while involved in operations on the north bank of the Ancre in mid-November so at first it seemed probable that William Bryant might have then sustained the wounds of which he later died.

Most unusually he was buried not only in England but locally, in grave 257 at The Platt Cemetery, Old Amersham, so the burial place was therefore presumably one chosen by his family. The local newspaper did not mark his passing. *Soldiers Died in the Great War* stated that he died of wounds in the Home theatre of war on 23 December 1916. In addition his medal card<sup>2</sup> notes that he was awarded The Allied Victory Medal and The British War Medal, 1914-18, but there is a blank for the date of first entry into an operational theatre of war.

While it seemed likely that he had been wounded while serving in France and evacuated to a military hospital somewhere in England, proof of this was lacking. However, the burial records for The Platt, still with Amersham Town Council,<sup>3</sup> showed that Wm John Bryant was interred in a public grave, under the auspices of Coleshill Joint Burial Committee, on 29 December 1916 and that he had died in Norwich Military Hospital. Only later was his resting-place reclassified as a war grave.

The death certificate showed that William Bryant, a private in 'C' Company, 4<sup>th</sup> Bedfordshire Regiment, had been received into the Norfolk and Norwich Military Hospital and died on 23 December of a septic compound fracture of the right thigh and knee sustained 28 days earlier. However, the date of death was originally written as 21 December and then corrected.

Looking again at the *War Diary* we can see that the 4th Bedfords on 13 November lost 48 Other Ranks killed in action, 9 died of wounds, 108 wounded and 16 missing in addition to 8 officers killed, 1 died of wounds and 4 wounded. Having been withdrawn from the line and re-equipped, they were occupied carrying supplies up to the line and on the 17<sup>th</sup> had to help clear the battlefield and bury the dead. Until at least the 24 November 1916 they were constantly on the move, mostly on foot but

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives WO 95/3118

<sup>2</sup> The National Archives WO 372/3/146833

<sup>3</sup> I am greatly indebted to Janette Plested, of Amersham Town Council, for finding the entry and for further information about the type of grave he was buried in. See page 34, entry no 2694.

occasionally by omnibus, and it is possible that Bryant's fractures were sustained then, depending on how accurate the Resident Medical Officer's notes were.

The death of this family's only surviving son, aged only 23, must have been particularly hard to bear.

William John Bryant is remembered with Honour in the  
Platt Cemetery, Amersham

