

William Edward Billins (28 April 1891 - 5 June 1916)



30 Chapel Road, Hounslow

William was the son of Arthur Edward Billins and Rose Annie Billins (nee Ray) who married on 29 March 1887 in Heston. Arthur was born in Fulham, London and his wife Rose was born in Hounslow. Arthur and Rose had 2 children so William had just one younger sister called Elsie Rose who was born in October 1893. His father Arthur was a carpenter by trade. In 1901 the family were living at 30 Chapel Road, Hounslow. At that time William was aged 10 and Elsie was 7. William attended Isleworth Town School. However in January 1902 William's mother Rose died at the age of 35 when William was aged 11 and Elsie just 8. William's father Arthur re-married in April 1903 to Emma Marian Sansom.

William enlisted in the army on 18 December 1909 in London and at that time gave his occupation as a "caddie". By the time of the 1911 Census

William's father Arthur and his stepmother Emma were living at 22 Thornbury Road, Isleworth. William himself was at Browdown military camp at Lee on Solent, near Gosport in Hampshire. On 31 October 1914 William married Agnes Rhoda North in Richmond. Previously Agnes had been in domestic service to the Cheshire family in Cresswell Road, Twickenham. By the end of 1915 William and Agnes had a daughter, Rhoda Annie Billins.

In the autumn of 1914 William was promoted to the rank of Corporal in the RMLI. He served on the flagship Drake in Australian waters and in June 1915 he joined the crew of HMS Hampshire. He took part in the Battle of Jutland (31 May -1 June 1916). Shortly afterwards on 5 June, HMS Hampshire was given the task of transporting Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War and his staff on a diplomatic mission from Scapa Flow to Russia. In poor weather conditions and gale force winds, HMS Hampshire struck a mine off the Orkney coast and sank within 15 minutes. Of more than 700 on board, there were only 12 survivors. William was among those lost, along with Lord Kitchener. He was aged 25. William's body was not recovered. He is commemorated on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial and on a memorial wall on the island of Orkney.

William's wife Agnes and her sister Emma were widowed within a few months of each other. Emma's husband Private Albert Victor Davis of the East Surrey Regiment died of wounds sustained in Mesopotamia on 19 March 1916. Agnes married again in 1918 to Albert Peake. She continued to live in Hounslow until her death in 1979 aged 84. William's daughter Rhoda married Albert Collins in 1938 and she also continued to live in Hounslow until her death aged 92 in 2003.

