



AIR MECHANIC 1ST CLASS WILLIAM GEORGE WOOLDRIDGE

SERVIVE NO. 837

5TH SQDN, ROYAL FLYING CORPS (RFC)

DIED 9TH NOVEMBER 1914 AGED 24

William, more often known as George, Wooldridge was born in Odiham in 1890ⁱ, the eldest son of David and Martha Wooldridge of Broad Oak, Odiham. The 1911 census form completed by his father, a 'Milk Man on Farm', records George's occupation as 'Cycle business'. George's two younger brothers, Stanley James and Cecil John, both still at school, were also living in the family homeⁱⁱ. George had attended Odiham Grammar School where his name is recorded on the Roll of Honour along with other "Old pupils who laid down their lives in the Great War 1914-1918 for freedom and righteousness" ⁱⁱⁱ.

After leaving school, George worked for Mr J E Chapple as a motor mechanic, probably a motor cycle mechanic judging by the census form. From his obituary in the local newspaper we learn that he was musical, having joined the Oaks Brass Band and become its Secretary; "always a great favourite with all who knew him"; and of a "very steady disposition" . He had taken and passed all the "military examinations" required to join the army^{iv}.

No. 5 Squadron, RFC was formed in Farnborough in July 1913. In September 1914 it moved to France to join the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) as a reconnaissance squadron^v. To date, no records have been found to establish when George took his exams and joined the RFC, but he became an early casualty of the Great War. However, at the behest of Odiham Society member Air Chief Marshal Sir Joe French, the Royal Air Force Museum London has kindly traced two war diaries and George's casualty card, which provide details of the circumstances of his death in St Omer, the General Headquarters of the BEF.

Flt Lt Bullock recorded in his diary –

"Left Bailleul 2.30 pm Friday 23rd Oct. changed letters with Tom as we moved off, arrived St Omer about 5 pm. German machines came over Sunday 25th Oct, fired at by A.A. gun and maxim, both got away. Sunday night 8th Nov

bomb thrown at Maple lorry during roll call, wounded seven men AMs. Carr, Beale, Spours, Wooldridge, Grange and Cpl Callus. Wooldridge died Monday 9th Nov and buried 3 pm 10th.^{vi}

A further report of the incident was recorded in the diary of Gp Capt Carmichael –

“At evening roll call 8th November a hand grenade was thrown among the assembled personnel of C. Flight from a spinney beside the M.T. : seven men were wounded and one died but the saboteur escaped.”^{vii}

William George Wooldridge was awarded the 1914 Star and the British War Medal 1914-20.^{viii} He is buried in Longuenesse (St. Omer) Souvenir Cemetery, Pas de Calais, three kilometres from St Omer. But this is not the end of his story. This research has found that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission casualty details were incorrectly recorded, spelling his surname as Woolridge. Having provided evidence for the correct spelling, the CWGC have kindly agreed to amend his record and headstone (Illustrati



III. 1 - William George Wooldridge's headstone at Longuenesse (St Omer) Souvenir Cemetery

ⁱ GRO Births, www.findmypast.co.uk

ⁱⁱ 1911 Census, Odiham, Hampshire ref: RG14PN6248 RG78PN296 RD109 SD1 ED14 SN85

ⁱⁱⁱ Wilson, CHS and Hansford FE, *The Story of Odiham Grammar School 1694-1930*, , Warren & Son Ltd, Winchester Appendix E, p.86

^{iv} These details were included in the obituary in the Hants & Berks Gazette, 14 November 1914.

^v *Air of Authority - A History of RAF Organisation, No 1 - 5 Squadron Histories*- <http://www.rafweb.org/Sqn001-5.htm>

^{vi} Source – War diary of Flt. Lt. Bullock, courtesy of RAF Museum, London

^{vii} Source – War diary of Group Capt. Carmichael, courtesy of RAF Museum, London

^{viii} Source - Ancestry.com. *British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920* [database on-line].