



# Ernest William Whiting

1888 - 1918

## 77 Kedleston Road

William was born Ernest William Gorton Gamble in Cheltenham in 1888 to Jessica Gamble, a single woman who was working as a domestic servant. In the 1891 census, aged three, he is listed as a visitor with Philip and Mary Whiting, living in Aston, Birmingham. Both Philip and Mary had been born near Cheltenham but it is not clear how they came to adopt Ernest.

By 1901 the family, with Ernest now known as William, were living at 42 Redshaw Street, Derby and by 1911 they were at 77 Kedleston Road.

Philip was an ornamental blacksmith and in partnership with Thomas and David Taylor, (See the feature on the Taylor family members who lived at 55 Statham Street). "Taylor, Whiting and Taylor" were based on St Peter's Street in Derby and, as well as providing metalworking services, offered electrical, plumbing and gas fitting services at a time when households were moving away from candle and oil lamps to gas and electric lighting.

William followed Philip into the family business and in 1911 married Mary Kitchen, who lived on Old Chester Road. They had set up home at 12 Silver Hill Road, Normanton when William volunteered for active service in January 1915. He was drafted to the Royal Army Medical Corps – as a regular at Watson Street Baptist church, where his father was

an elder, he may have had links with the Boys Brigade and had received first aid training – his attestation paper refers to 3 years experience with "VBB".

After his training he served at home (Britain and Ireland) until 20 February 1917 when he was posted to France. By this time his son, Kenneth, was 5 months old (born October 1916) and his family appear to have been back living with his parents at 77 Kedleston Road.

He served with the 2<sup>nd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> (North Midland) Field Ambulance in France. Field Ambulances were not, as the name implies, a vehicle but were mobile medical units which were attached to an army division.



© IWM Q 1098. Field Ambulance wagon passing over muddy ground near Ovillers, near the Somme, September 1916. William would have been familiar with working in conditions like these.

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(continued)



© IWM Q 7080. Second Battle of Arras. A horse ambulance (2/3rd London Field Ambulance of the Royal Army Medical Corps) and a stranded tank rendered useless by gas in attacks on 24 August, at the crossroads. Croisilles, 13 September 1918.

The Field Ambulances established operational points back from the front line to evacuate casualties, starting with First Aid points backed up by stretcher bearer relay posts to Advanced Dressing stations and then on to main Dressing Stations. There were also Walking Wounded collecting stations along with rest areas and sick rooms.

It was a dangerous job and he would have seen many horrific injuries and suffered gruelling situations in the course of his work on or near the front line. On 30 September 1917 he himself became a patient after he was admitted to a casualty clearing station suffering from poison gas inhalation. He was discharged 6 days later to return to duty. His record implies that he was given leave to return to the UK in March 1918 and it is likely he took time to

visit his family in Derby.

By now his unit was based at Bruay near Bethune in Northern France, supporting the final assault on the German frontline in summer 1918. On 22 August 1918 William, now a Sergeant, died of his wounds during fighting – a testament to the dangers of serving with the RAMC. He is buried at the British Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery at Bac-du-Sud, Bailleulval, near Arras.

His widow Mary continued to live with William's parents, although in 1922 she and Kenneth travelled to Springfield, Massachusetts where she worked as a housekeeper, before returning to the UK in July 1923. Philip and Mary lived out their lives at number 77 Kedleston Road – Philip died in 1940, Mary in 1945.