

BRIAN HAROLD FREARSON

Brian Harold FREARSON was born on 1 June 1898.

His family had always been farmers, and can be traced back to Ockbrook in Derbyshire in the 1600s. The family moved to Lincolnshire in the early 1800s.

Brian's father, Henry John Frearson was born on a farm in West Barkwith, Lincolnshire in 1853, but because of difficulties in finding a farm, he moved to Hampshire with two of his brothers between 1871 and 1875, and farmed in Barton Stacey. His mother was from Appleford, Berkshire and her family moved to a neighbouring farm in Hampshire and they married in 1853.

Brian was the youngest of eleven children born to Henry and Annie between 1881 and 1896. All but one survived into adulthood.

The family later moved to Odstone Farm at Odstone Tything in Ashbury. Little is known of his earliest years and he probably had a governess at the farm and he was living there for the 1911 census. In that year was also attending Swindon College being registered as in 'Year 1911'. The College was originally set up in 1843 by the Great Western Railway Company to provide educational classes for its employees.

He served during the First War from 1917 - 1918 and was latterly a Pioneer in the 'A' Signal Depot Bedford, Royal Engineers, Regimental No.237853. His service records in The National Archives 'burnt records', show that he was living at 56, Eardley Crescent, Kensington when he was recruited at the age of 18 years and [nearly!] 8 months. He was a telegraphist. He was 5ft. 9ins. tall, weighed 152lbs. and had a 38inch chest. He had been vaccinated in infancy and had a 'Mole on L bend of elbow'. The papers are stamped 'Recruiting Office, White City, Uxbridge Road Entrance'.

He was 'Deemed to have been enlisted' on 2 March 1916, but was not 'Called up for Service' until nearly a year later. In the mean time, in April 1916, he appears on a list in the British Postal Service Appointment Book¹ - a register of those joining the Post Office. He appears as '28864, Cert Wireless Oper, E 5492' which would imply he was already qualified or trained at that early date, and was being used prior to his military service. Indeed, a note in the Swindonian, the College's magazine, in autumn 1916 reads:

'B. H. Frearson ('11) has been employed as a wireless operator on a transport to India'.

It seems that as a (qualified) telegraphist, he may have undertaken this voyage in the interim before he was finally 'called up' and posted to 'Signal Depot' on Home Service from 9 February to 19 September 1917. It appears that he was at first at Fenny Stratford where as well as receiving training, he was given TAB inoculations on 17 and 26 April 1917 and 'Vaccin' on 23 April 1917. He was apparently 'Posted' on 9 August 1917. Transferred to Base Signal Depot on 20 August 1917.

He was then transferred to Bedford 'A' Signal Depot on 28 October 1917, probably at the Royal Engineers Signal Service Depot. He was then a 'Cable Telegraphist'.

He was later posted to France, but was there for less than five weeks, from 20 September until 27 October 1917. He suffered in a gas attack, and was repatriated to England, thus being recorded as again on Home Service attached to Bedford 'A' Signal Depot from 28 October 1917 to 4 February 1918.

He was sent for medical treatment to Redlands Hospital in Reading and was there for over three months; he died at 9.30pm on 4 February 1918, from 'Pyæmia' and according to the post-mortem report from 'General Septicaemia'. A Medical Statement was provided to Chatham by 'Dr ?Hadir ?Drewir [Lady]'

He was buried on 9 February 1918 in Reading Cemetery, Military Section, in 'Plot 72', which is now a separate area surrounded by hedges. There are no longer any marked graves, although a contemporary photograph shows there was one for him. A screen-wall memorial commemorates those buried there. His inscription reads: -

'237853. Pioneer B. H. Frearson. Royal Engineers. 4.2.18 38'.

¹ TNA, British Postal Museum and Archive, POST 58/113, searchable on Ancestry.co.uk.

It is assumed '38' was the grave number.

A formal note from the Royal Engineers Record Office at Chatham, enclosing '... a message of sympathy in your bereavement, from the King and the Queen' was sent later in February. The name had been mistyped Trearson. A 'Next of Kin' form was filled in by his elder brother Arthur, who only filled in the details for one brother, himself, and one sister, Annie May Frearson, who was in fact by then married to Sydney Peplar.

There is a stained glass memorial window to him and the other 'old boys' and former college staff at Swindon College who lost their lives in the Great War, and his name is on a list in Ashbury church.