



William David Frost

782200 Private 2nd Battalion Canadian Machine Gun Corps

He died on 28th August 1918 in France, aged 35

William is buried at Quebec Cemetery, Cherisy, Pas de Calais, France

William David Frost was the grandson of a brickmaker, Ambrose Frost from Bressingham, who had married Mary Ann Herod, from Loddon, in 1847. Their first child, arrived in 1848 and their second, Ambrose Jnr, in 1850, the little family appeared in the 1851 census out at Baker's Barn supplementing their income with 3 lodgers: another young brickmaker and two agricultural labourers, in their teens. Poor Mary Ann would have had her work cut out with 4 hungry men to feed and two very young children to care for. Ambrose Snr had a very busy decade between 1851 and the next census in 1861. Between building his business up from being a journeyman brickmaker to a master brickmaker (employing 3 men and two boys), and bell ringing, (a lot of practice and brain

power was needed to achieve the peals he rang with the rest of the Redenhall ringers) he also found the time and energy to make another 4 children!

Norfolk Chronicle
20 Mar 1852

Change Ringing.—On the 17th ult., a company of ringers ascended the tower of Redenhall church, and rung a complete peal of 5024 changes of Oxford treble bob major, in three hours and 15 minutes, conducted by John Elles, and rung by the following persons:—John Elles, treble; Wm. Sheldrake, 2; Robt. Moss, 3; Ambrose Frost, 4; Elijah Harber, 5; Geo. Mobbs, 6; C. H. Hammond, 7; and B. Smith, tenor.

In the 1871 census the family were still out at Baker's Barn although there seem to have been no more children added to the family. Ambrose Snr's second son, William, only a year younger than Ambrose jnr was working with his uncle, David Frost, out in Brook. As so often happened, trades ran in the family. David was also a brickmaker though he combined this with farming 38 acres and raising his 7 children – another hard-working fellow. Names, as often happened, also ran in the family so in this one household we had 17 years old William Frost, born in Brook and 19 years old William Frost, born in Redenhall, thus explaining why nicknames were so popular at this time!

1871 was a time of tragedy at the kiln. Ambrose had been given a shot gun by a neighbouring landowner in order to scare birds from crops. This gun, with a carelessness that seems shocking today but at the time seemed accepted by the court to be perfectly normal, he left lying, loaded across a pile of bricks in his yard. That Saturday in January, Ambrose had left the brick yard but six chaps had decided to enjoy lunch in his brick kiln. This may sound a bit odd but there would have been a delightful residual warmth in the kiln that would have been particularly appreciated on a cold Norfolk winter's day. One of the number, Waller, left the gun loaded with powder and shot, the extent of his safety measures seem to have been telling William not to touch the gun, indicating a slight concern that he may have been tempted to do just that. After the company had finished eating, two

of their number, George Girling (18) and William Goldsmith (11) left the kiln together; three minutes later young William came running back crying 'Father, Father, I have shot George.' William's father, George Goldsmith, ran out to find poor Girling lying on the ground with his head bleeding.

In the subsequent coroners hearing, it transpired that young William did not attend school and like

Ambrose Frost deposed—I am a brickmaker, and loaded the gun now produced on Saturday morning, and laid it by the side of a pile of bricks. I left the yard at dinner time, and returned at one. Charles Waller came to me, and I went to the kiln and saw deceased lying by the side of the hale of bricks bleeding from his forehead. Goldsmith told me he caught the gun against his trowsers. He said the trigger caught and went off and shot deceased. I left the gun on half-cock. I had twice fired off the gun that morning. It was charged with powder and shot. The gun now produced is the one. It belongs to Mr. Godney, who gave it to me to scare the birds with. Where I left the gun was about two yards from where I found Girling lying.

many chaps of the time was illiterate. William had told the policeman that attended, P.C. Tuddenham, that the gun, an old one, had caught in his trousers and gone off causing fatal head injuries to Girling, which he died of the following evening. The verdict was returned that 'The deceased died of a gun-shot wound accidentally caused by William Goldsmith.

Norfolk News
17 Jun 1871

In spite of this tragedy, William Goldsmith carried on working at the brick kiln, the 1871 census shows the then 12 years old William was still a brickmaker, his was one of three families all living next to each other at Furze Green whose heads and older sons were brickmakers – 6 chaps in three adjacent houses.

A month or so later Ambrose was the complainant when his chum, Henry Parker 'for a lark' nicked a turnip of a watch from Ambrose Frost. Brickmaker Frost went to the Crown sometime after midnight and met up with several chums including Parker – in those days, pubs stayed open as long as people stayed drinking! Parker offered Frost 30s for his watch and chain which was refused. When, a little while later, Frost and Parker ambled out, Frost noticed his watch was missing. The two trotted back to the Crown to look for the watch when they bumped into P.C. Tuddenham, the constable who only a few months earlier had attended the tragic shooting out at the Brick Kiln. Parker denied any knowledge of the whereabouts of the watch but Tuddenham's bat-like hearing heard the tell-tale watch violently ticking apparently beneath the prisoner's waistcoat. This would have been the smart time for Parker to confess that he had played a prank on Frost, instead he 'jiffled' as if uncomfortable. Tuddenham went through Parker's pockets but was surprised not to find the watch – still suspicious he reversed a few paces to where Parker had 'jiffled' and found the watch. At this point Parker, who was in an early stage of intoxication, admitted he had taken the watch for a lark. Rather fiercely Parker was given four months hard labour.

Ambrose Snr was obviously a steady chap; not sure where he was in 1841, but from 1851 all the way through to 1891 he and, at least some of, his children lived out at Baker's Barn. Ambrose's kiln and his source of clay would both have been adjacent, or at least near to his home. Firing bricks in those days was as much an art as it was a science and the kilns would have needed careful supervision through the long firing process. Transporting wet clay would have been hard work so, set your kiln up near your clay pit and then set your home up near your kiln! His boys, including those who had set up their own homes and families, also followed their father's trade making bricks, for a time at least although most went in to other trades at some point. Aged 72 in 1891, at least he

still had his unmarried son George at home to help in the business that he continued to run, doubtless the unmarried daughter still at home assisted her mother.

Ambrose Frost and William Frost, aged 11 years and 13 years, were charged by W. B. Ringer, of Mendham, farmer, with trespassing on lands in the occupation of the trustees of J. S. Holmes, Esq., at Redenhall, on the 4th inst., in search of game.—Case settled out of Court by defendants paying 7s. costs.

Norwich Mercury
24 Dec 1864

Ambrose Snr's son.
Ambrose Jnr, the father
of our Harleston Hero,

was cut from a very different cloth to his hardworking steady father. He and his brother, William, were already in trouble with the authorities on the brink of their teens, in Ambrose Jnr's case this was to be the start of 50 years popping up in the Harleston and Bungay Magistrate's Courts!

Norwich Mercury
21 Dec 1872

8 years later and Ambrose was still up to mischief; Ambrose Jnr and a friend were fined the substantial sums of 5s

AT THE PETTY SESSIONS held on Thursday, before R. D. French, Esq. (Chairman), and Captain Cartwright, James Brown, of Bungay, for keeping a dog without a license, was fined 50s.—Ambrose Frost, for a like offence, was also fined 50s., which was paid for him.

or £2 10s apiece for keeping unlicensed dogs, I had originally assumed the reason for such substantial fines was the magistrates suspicion, if not the certain knowledge, that those dogs were being used for poaching! I am intrigued who paid for Frost's fine though?

As it transpired, the magistrates were having another bite at the cherry of a case that had been tried a month or so earlier following the wayward pair's dogs savaging a couple of sheep. Neither had the money to pay the fine so they both got hauled off to prison for a month, only to be trotted out after they had served their sentences to face the new charges,

the public. Fined 5s. and 5s. costs. Paid.—Ambrose Frost and Jas. Brown were charged with being the owners of two dogs which mangled two sheep on the 23rd of October, the property of Mr. H. Butcher, of Bungay. The value of the sheep being £3. 5s. each, the defendants were each ordered to pay that amount and costs 5s. 6d. each, or to be committed for one month. The money not being forthcoming, defendants were removed in custody.—Wm. Jolly, Emma

Norwich Mercury
9 Nov 1872

Nothing daunted, almost exactly a year to the week later, Ambrose Frost jnr and three chums were out poaching again, as one of the dog owners Ambrose was fined a total of £2 5s on this outing.

Only a few years later, in November 1875, Ambrose Jnr was in a lot of trouble, due to his involvement in the Harleston Riots. These riots started off as a protest against a very unpopular family who had moved into the Thoroughfare and culminated in the making and burning of effigies, molten burning tar running down the streets and a full on assault on the house of the victims which resulted in destruction to the property and an assault on the unfortunate single policeman left in town to deal with the matter. I say Ambrose was involved, he was actually one of the main protagonists; it was whilst the unfortunate P.C Tuddenham attempted to prevent Ambrose from smashing the house shutters that some of Ambrose's chums smacked Tuddenham on the head. Bearing in mind the events of the previous years, it was hardly as if Tuddenham was going to fail to recognise him!

It was about this time that Ambrose Jnr married Betsy Norman, the daughter of a farm labourer from Weybread. During a marriage of about 23 years duration, they had about 7 children that survived

long enough to appear in a census, William David was the second of these children. Marriage seems to have calmed Ambrose down, no more appearances (that I have found) in the courts for poaching after his marriage. Possibly not an ideal father, he was one of three men fined in late 1884 for failing to send his children to school – it was a different time though! The couple had set up home on the Redenhall Road, 'Seven Cottages'; rather basic housing that tended to be lived in by those scraping by. They remained in that area to the end of their married life which was abruptly truncated in 1898

Ambrose's wife, Betsey Frost was nursing Lottie Saunders, who would have either been in labour with, or recovering from the delivery of young Herbert – 3 years old in 1901 and born in Suffolk. Although Betsey had a history of breathlessness due to a diseased heart, she arrived at the Saunders' in apparent good health but four days later a scream from Lottie alerted her husband who rushed in to his bedroom to find Betsey had apparently fainted, landing on her knees by the bed. The Doctor was sent for from Fressingfeild (although these are Harleston families, the Saunders were in Stradbroke at this time) and at a quarter past three the Doctor arrived to find Betsey barely alive, her heart just fluttering. Betsey died shortly after, leaving Ambrose with six children to rear. At the time he was working as a bricklayer, working miles away in Ipswich on a 3 weeks contract

I am afraid that without his wife, Betsey, Ambrose slightly fell apart and 1898 saw the first of what were to be a number of appearances in court for being drunk and disorderly. His oldest son, our William David, took advantage of his father's distraction and at the same court his father was being fined for drunkenness, William, then aged 16, was fined 2s for throwing stones on the highway.

Norfolk News
18 Nov 1899

I suspect Betsey's father had moved into the household before his daughter's death, aged 82 in the 1901 census I am not sure he would have been much help in keeping order!

Ambrose Frost, labourer, Harleston, was charged with being drunk on licensed premises at Harleston on 23rd October. It appeared that defendant went to the Duke William Inn in a drunken condition, and was found there by Inspector Southgate. The landlady had refused him drink, so that there was no reflection on the management of the house. He was fined 6s., and costs 4s.

William Frost, Charles Francis, and Ernest Sillett, three Harleston lads, were charged with throwing stones on the the highway to the annoyance of passengers, and were each fined 2s.

Ernest Barnard of Needham, Walter Reeve of Starston, and Ernest Cook of Harleston were severally charged with letting off fireworks on the highway, and were each fined 1s., and 2s. 6d. costs.

Unlike many in a similar situation, Ambrose did not remarry but by 1911 he had taken himself and 4 of his adult, unmarried children out to Starston. Having appeared in the last 2 returns as a maltsters labourer, in this final census, 61 years old Ambrose had gone back to brickmaking whilst his sons were general labourers.

Perhaps being a fair trot from the nearest pub helped Ambrose keep his boozing under control – the court appearances reduced although I did find a final one in 1913 when he was in trouble for getting

smashed at the Duke William !

Ambrose Frost, of Redenhall, brickmaker, was charged with being disorderly and refusing to quit the Duke William public-house, Harleston, on 15th July. Defendant was fined 2/6 and costs 4/-.

Diss Express
25 Jul 1913

This may well have been the upshot of a final farewell drink to his son, William David Frost, who in 1913, or possibly 1912 (a few William Frosts set off to Canada at this time) set sail for Quebec from Glasgow. Just coming up to age 30, he may have decided that this was his opportunity to make something of his life. He had taken his skills with him to this new, fast growing country and became a bricklayer in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. Like so many of the young men of Harleston, he had joined the militia, more or less from the moment he was old enough, at age 17, to the moment he left the country aged 30 – he claimed over 13 years of service when he enlisted on 6th March 1916. This was with the 128th Overseas Battalion and although he may have officially been a private, the Regimental War Diary described him as a Cpl, it may have been a temporary appointment.

William Frost had travelled a long way from Harleston but brickmaking was in his blood and those skills he took with him to a new world and a new start. I think there may have been a time when William and his siblings effectively lost both parents, his mother to a premature death, his grieving father to the bottom of a bottle. When his country needed him, he was ready to stand up and be counted, I have no doubt his 13 years in the local militia would have made him an attractive recruit. It would be marvellous to think he had the chance to visit his home town when on leave from the front, he had not been away many years and his father and many siblings would have still been about. Indeed, his father, despite the wayward years, survived until 1929 when he died at the very respectable age of 79.