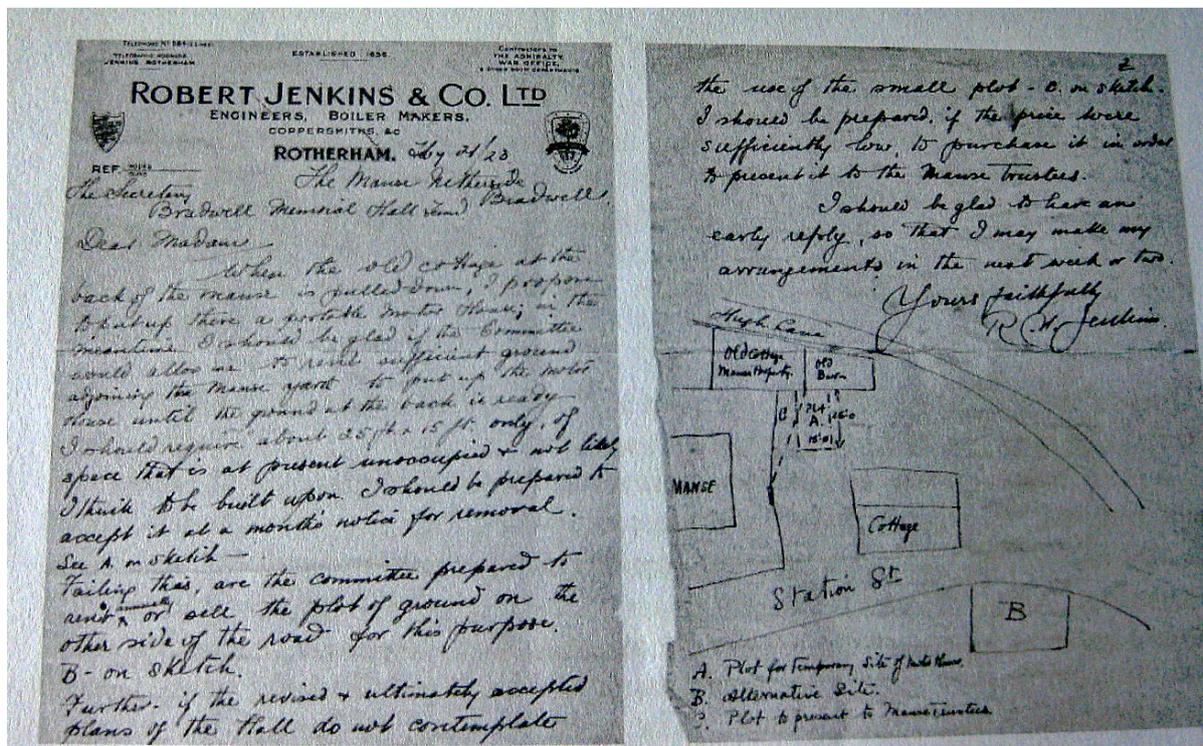


## Robert William Jenkins

### A Rotherham Boiler Maker

In her survey of the correspondence received by the trustees of the Bradwell War Memorial Hall Lilian Riddall uncovered a letter written to them in 1923. The hand-written letter was on the notepaper of Robert Jenkins & Co L<sup>TD</sup> Engineers & Boiler Makers Rotherham. The name and address of the sender were R W Jenkins of The Manse (now the Old Manse), Netherside, Bradwell. At that time, although the trustees of the Hall had acquired the land next to the Manse, building work had not begun, indeed there was still some demolition work to be carried out on two cottages. Robert Jenkins was asking permission to build a temporary garage on part of that land. To show where on the site he wanted to build his garage he provided a very useful hand drawn sketch of the whole intended building land for the Hall in his letter. It was bounded by Hugh Lane and Netherside (although he names it Station Street). The sketch also shows the cottages then on the site that would eventually be removed. Permission was granted to put a temporary motor garage on the top left hand of the site



Request to build a temporary garage

closest to the Manse. The conditions were that the structure must be removed at a months' notice and the monthly rent was set at 6d with Mr Jenkins paying his own rates. It is interesting to speculate whether Robert was using a 'motor car heater' his company was advertising at that time. This wasn't for fitting in a car but was to be installed in the garage to keep the whole vehicle warm! At the same time the Trustees rejected a request from Mr Pashley to put up a motor garage opposite the site on the other side of Netherside (marked 'B' in Robert's letter). By that time Mr Pashley had begun to establish a taxi service.

Robert William Jenkins' association with the Manse is not surprising because he was a lay preacher of the Wesleyan Methodist circuit. Mary Bradwell (née Evans) who still lives in the

village remembers hearing Robert Jenkins preach and his wife Lillie May was Mary's first Sunday school teacher. In the 1911 census however the family were resident in Rotherham.

Robert William Jenkins had joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Volunteer Battalion of the York and Lancs. Regiment in 1898. In 1899/1900 he was on draft for the Boer War attached to the 6<sup>th</sup> Provisional Battalion of the Regiment. He was based at Fermoy, near Cork, Eire. Apparently, his battalion was standing by for draft to Africa when the Second Boer War ended. On the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1900 he was appointed 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Volunteer Battalion of the York and Lancs. In the years before WW1 he remained with the Volunteer Battalion serving 'At Home'. In 1904 he was promoted to Lieutenant and on the 17<sup>th</sup> September 1908 he was promoted to Captain. In February 1912 he was appointed Secretary of the Rotherham Branch Committee of the National Reserve. Then in 9<sup>th</sup> September 1914 barely a month after the declaration of war Robert William Jenkins was recalled to the 5<sup>th</sup> Btn. York and Lancs. (10<sup>th</sup> Corps Cycle Btn.) and reappointed Captain. It seems that in 1915 he moved his family to Bradwell it is said to protect them from the expected Zeppelin raids on Sheffield and Rotherham. They remained in Bradwell until 1930. One of Robert William's earlier posts on rejoining the Army was that of a recruiting officer based in Bradwell. The first mention of Robert Jenkins to be found in the collection of newspaper cuttings about Bradwell held by the Bradwell Historical Society (BHS) comes on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1915. During a visit home on leave Captain Jenkins gave a talk on 'Stonewall Jackson' to the scholars and teachers of the Wesleyan Sunday School.

Captain Jenkins' visits home to Bradwell continued to be recorded in the newspaper cuttings in the course of the war. At the same time the activities in the village of his wife and especially daughter Edna and later daughter (Clarice) Jean were noted, almost all associated with activities of the Wesleyan Methodists. Thus in January 1915 Lillie May Jenkins seconded the vote of thanks to Mrs Barber on the occasion of the distribution of prizes to Wesleyan children. (Mrs Barber was the grandmother of later Chancellor of the Exchequer Tony Barber and best-selling novelist Noel Barber.) The following year Edna Jenkins who was about 8 at the time won several prizes at the Wesleyan children's exhibition including one for her pudding making. Edna was also credited with winning a prize in the egg and spoon race and with captaining a girl's tug-of-war team.



*Captain Robert William Jenkins 1918*

After home Army duties for much of the war Robert William finally arrived in France with the Army Cyclists Corps on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1918. He joined the Censor Staff at Boulogne-sur-Mer on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1918 and was appointed Head Censor on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1919, dealing with Postal Censorship. However, his role may have been wider because, as well as being fluent in German and French, there are references to the fact that he could read 'bad German handwriting'. On 13<sup>th</sup> November 1918 he was appointed temporary Major. In December 1918 he was back at home "awaiting embarkation orders" to join the North Russia Expeditionary Force (NREF). During this visit to Bradwell he managed to preside over an entertainment when daughters Jean made a speech and Edna played a piano duet with Winnie Bennett. He also found time to propose a vote of thanks to MP (for West Derbyshire) Mr C.F. White. Then, recalled to duty, he was seconded to the Intelligence Special List and joined the NREF under General Ironside.



*General Ironside at Archangel 1919*

At that time the UK were seeking to provide support for the White Russians against the Bolsheviks. Robert William left the UK on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1919 and landed in North Russia on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1919. He was employed first as a Field Censor and later as the Head Censor, Field Section, based in Archangel. He returned to the UK in September 1919 and was "disembodied" (demobilised) on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1919 although he didn't formally resign from the Army until 4<sup>th</sup> October 1920.

However, his army service didn't end there. In a letter dated 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1921 he was asked by the Captain and Adjutant of what was by then the 5<sup>th</sup> York and Lancs. Battalion Defence Force "because of the current situation" to

'report for duty with the Battalion as soon as possible. This would require a certain amount of your time, and if convenient all your time, but every consideration will be given to your business so long as the situation allows. You will be taken on the strength of the Battalion on your arrival and be given the rank of Captain.'

The 'situation' referred to was the declaration of a state of emergency on 31<sup>st</sup> March that year after a coal miners' strike had been called. The length of this period of service is not recorded

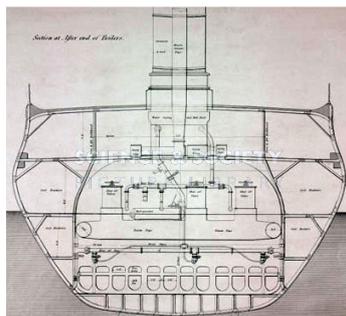
but as was to be expected it did not take him abroad. The final reference we have to his army service was that he transferred to the Territorial Reserve on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1946 at the age of 48

Following his demobilization he quickly became prominent once more in the life of the village. But in 1930 his family moved to 35 Hastings Avenue, Sheffield. However in a document dated 1934 the name of R W Jenkins appears among the list of trustees of the Manse in Bradwell. In 1939 Robert was listed as a Steel Works Director. His address remained 35 Hastings Avenue when he died in the Royal Infirmary, Sheffield in 1966.



*Robert William Jenkins 1945-50*

The making of boilers had a long history in the Jenkins family. In the registration of the baptism of Robert Jenkins at St Anne's Church, Bitton in Gloucestershire in 1828 the occupation of his father Peter is given as boilermaker. In fact thirteen years later in the 1841 census (the first full national census) the occupation of both father and son is stated to be that of boiler maker. Unfortunately the occupation of Peter's father Job was not stated when the former was baptised in 1807 but thereafter Job was described as being a miner and then a market gardener. So boiler making by the Jenkins family seems to have started early in the 19C in Gloucestershire. William Jenkins, the son of Peter is also shown as a boiler maker in Gloucestershire in 1841. In 1848 Robert Jenkins (Peter's son) was employed at William Patterson's packet yard in Bristol where both he and his father were employed in making, apart from other items, the boilers for the SS *Great Britain*. After completing his apprenticeship at the Avonside Engineering Works also in Bristol Robert travelled throughout South Wales, Somerset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire working on boilers in various collieries. In 1852 he went north to work for a time at the Codnor works of the Butterley Iron Co. in South Derbyshire, and shortly afterwards took up a post preparing tools for boiler making with the firm of Isaac Dodds & Son in Rotherham.



*The boilers of the SS Great Britain*

In 1857 he moved his home from Bristol to Rotherham, bringing with him his wife and first son. At about the same time for reasons that aren't clear, he was sacked by Isaac Dodds, but rather than leave Rotherham, he set himself up as a 'manufacturer of steam boilers'. He was joined in the firm by his brother-in-law, James Tapp – the first incarnation of the firm being Jenkins & Tapp. By 1856 his son also Robert and also a boiler maker had moved to Kimberworth, a suburb of Rotherham in South Yorkshire. It was here the Ivanhoe Works of R Jenkins & Co<sup>LTD.</sup> was established in Wortley Road. As we follow the company through by decades via the census the eldest son was first apprenticed as 'Commercial Traveller (Boilers)' and ten years later listed as the head of the Company. Thus our Robert William is shown as 'Commercial Traveller (Boilers)' in 1911. Thereafter war intervened. The Rotherham Company remained in business and by 1936 the output of the sprawling works had increased to over 500 tonnes of welded work per month. By this time however Robert William was listed as a Steel Works Director in Sheffield. Throughout WWII the Rotherham Company specialised in the construction of amongst other things Bailey Bridges. In 1970s more than 1,000 staff were employed in the company's five divisions, but following a downturn they were forced to file for voluntary liquidation in 2003. Some of the buildings continued to be used as a snooker hall and a gym but the site was finally levelled in 2017 when the presence of large quantities of asbestos posed a particular problem.

There was a plaque outside the Ivanhoe Works commemorating the lives of some of Rotherham men who lost their lives in World War II. One of those names is that of Robert William Jenkins' younger brother Alfred Noel who was born in Rotherham in early 1903. He was a career soldier being granted a commission in the Territorial Army as a 2nd Lieutenant in the 5th Btn. York and Lancs. Regiment in January 1922. His appointment in the regular army came in 1927 and by 1930 he was gazetted Lieutenant. In 1932 he switched to the Royal Army Service Corps. Promotions then saw him made Captain and then Major. In 1941 as part of the forces in Greece he was evacuated when the Germans invaded. Major Jenkins was recorded as dying on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1941, being lost at sea, most probably during evacuation from the Peloponnese Peninsula at Nauplio (now Nafplio). On that day the ex-Dutch liner that had been converted to the troopship *Slamat* was bombed by German aircraft and sank the following day. Many of the survivors were picked up by the destroyers HMS *Wryneck* and HMS *Diamond*, but these two were themselves lost on the 27<sup>th</sup> April. Alfred Noel Jenkins, aged 38, is commemorated on the Athens Memorial.

*Much of the information about the early days of the Jenkins boiler makers, R W Jenkins' military service in 1918-20 and photographs of his grandfather were supplied by Peter Mason to whom the BHS is very grateful.*