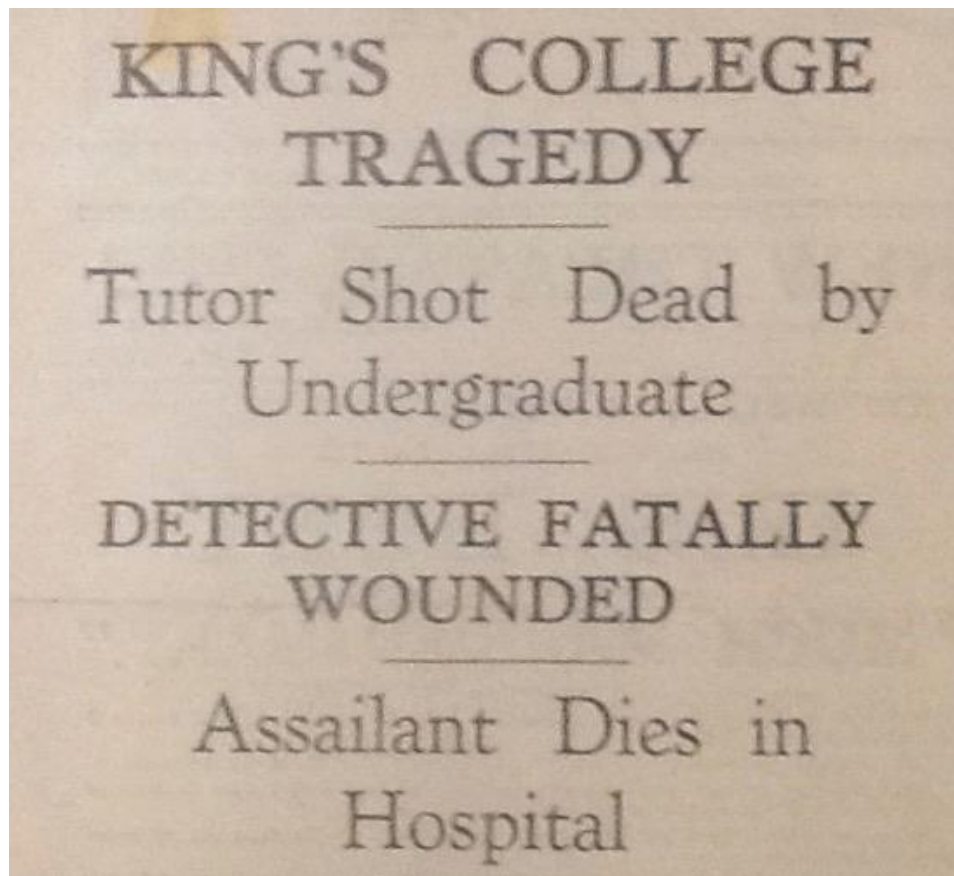


FRANCIS WILLIS

STEADFAST. FAITHFUL. TRUE



On Wednesday 4th June 1930 the Cambridge Daily News reported the death of Detective Sergeant Francis James WILLIS of the Borough Police Force.

The day previously Det. Sgt. WILLIS had gone to King's College to interview a 19-year-old student, Douglas Newton POTTS. The interview took place in the rooms of and in the presence of POTTS' tutor, Dr. A. F. R. WOLLASTON. Without warning the student, POTTS, took out an automatic pistol, aiming it at his tutor. Det. Sgt. WILLIS fearlessly threw himself at the student but was shot twice. POTTS then shot Dr. WOLLASTON through the heart killing him instantly before turning the weapon on himself. Despite his injuries Det. Sgt. WILLIS was able to crawl from the room to raise the alarm, calling for help. He was taken to Addenbrooke's Hospital,

Haverhill People (A Haverhill Family History Group Project 2017)

which was at the time located in Trumpington Street, where he was able to make a full statement to the Chief Constable. This statement was used as evidence at the inquest of all three men. Det. Sgt. WILLIS's wounds were not originally thought to be life threatening but that evening his condition quickly changed and an emergency operation was undertaken. Det. Sgt. WILLIS died overnight.

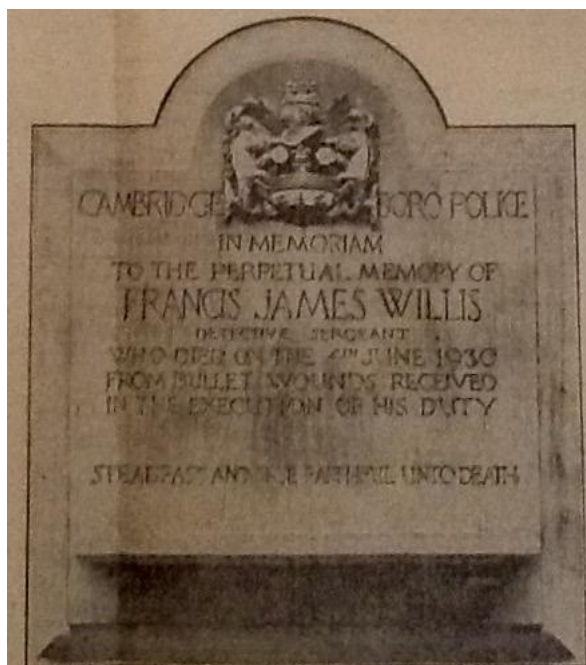
Det. Sgt. WILLIS was buried on Saturday 7th June 1930 in Haverhill Cemetery with a funeral befitting a man of his courage and standing. The service, which took place at the West End Congregational Church, was officiated by Rev Salusbury-Jones and was extremely well attended with his family being joined by colleagues and representatives from twelve different police forces and many members of the local community, friends and neighbours.





Shortly after the funeral an appeal fund was instigated to accrue funds for the widow as having only been in the service a relatively short time his pension was not thought to be sufficient to sustain her. Contributions flowed in.

A stone memorial for Detective Sergeant WILLIS was unveiled at Cambridge police station on Tuesday 13th January 1931.



Francis James WILLIS 1894 – 1930



Francis (Frank) was born in Haverhill on 19th June 1894 to Francis and Clara (NUNN) who lived at 72 Primrose Hill, Haverhill. The second of nine children: Jessie Florence (1892 who died as a child) Ethel Grace (1896) Gertrude Edith (1898) James Frederick (1901) William Arthur (1904) Gordon Heaton (1906) Jessie Florence (1911) and Elsie (1912).

Frank attended the local Board School before working as a yardman at the Co-operative Society before joining the garment manufacturer, Gurteens and Sons, in Chantry Mill but war was approaching.

Frank answered the call to arms, enlisting on 2nd November 1914, aged 20. He joined the 2/5th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment at Bury St Edmunds and attained the rank of Sergeant within twelve months.

In May 1917 he was transferred to the Kings African Rifles and was promoted to Company Quartermaster Sergeant, the rank he held until his discharge on 11th July 1919. In this role he was responsible to the Officer Commanding his Company for the accurate preparation of all Company returns, requisitions, and documents other than those rendered by the Company Sergeant-Major, and ensuring that they are rendered punctually at the time appointed. He would keep a nominal roll of every man in his Company, showing in detail all information that was likely to be required.



During the First World War the Company Quartermaster Sergeant (CQMS) in the British Army was the Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) in a company who oversaw supplies. The CQMS also served as deputy to the Company Sergeant Major and would have been the second most senior NCO in the company.



(Company quartermaster sergeant insignia, three chevrons and a crown.)



Upon his discharge Francis James WILLIS received a Silver War badge under Paragraph 392 King's Regulations (*xvia*) *Surplus to military requirements (having suffered impairment since entry into the service)* the cause of which is listed in his army record as malaria. He was awarded the British War and Victory medals.



Following his discharge in 1919, Frank returned to Haverhill and his job in the textile department at Chauntry Mill before applying to join the Cambridge Borough Police Force. His application was successful and he entered the Force on the 7th June 1920. His roles included that of uniformed patrol constable and cycle patrol constable.

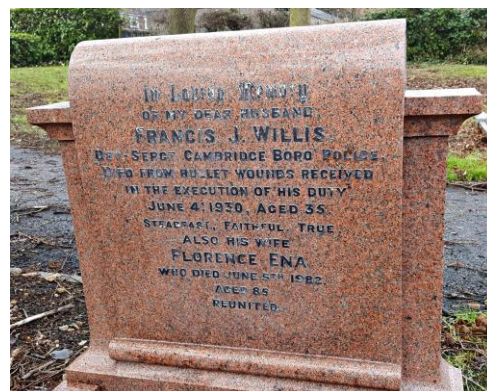


In June 1922, Frank married Florence Ena BACON from Steeple Bumpstead and they made their home in Cambridge. They did not have any children.

He continued to rise in rank reaching Detective Sergeant on 3rd October 1929 and in this role was in charge of the Detective department.

Frank was carrying out his duties when he was fatally wounded on 3rd June 1930 dying the following day, the eve of his wedding anniversary.

His widow Florence continued to live in Cambridge until she passed away on what would have been the 60th anniversary of her marriage, the 5th June 1982. She was buried with her late husband in Haverhill Cemetery.



Written by Karen Young

Many thanks are due to Father Michael Teader, whose mother Elsie was Frank's youngest sister, and who provided information, old newspaper reports and photographs.