

## **Sergeant William John Laban Jones M.M.©**

**Regimental number: 139041**

**256th Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers**

**born: 1892–died: 28 July 1917**

### **HE ANSWERED HIS COUNTRY'S CALL**

Sergeant William John Jones' family remembered the sacrifice he made with this inscription on his gravestone.<sup>1</sup>

William was the only son of John and Mary Ann (née Laban) Jones. His parents had married in Neath, Glamorganshire, Wales, in 1891.<sup>2</sup> William was born the following year and baptized as William John Laban on 29 May 1892 in Briton Ferry, Glamorganshire.<sup>3</sup> Two years later, William's sister, Annie Elizabeth, was born on 2 June 1894<sup>4</sup> in Pontardawe, near Glamorgan,<sup>5</sup> but was not baptized until 7 February 1901 at the age of 6.<sup>6</sup> Their third child, Elsie May, was probably born in early 1904 and died soon after birth.<sup>7</sup>

In 1901, the family was living in Pontardawe, where John was a colliery mechanic.<sup>8</sup> Ten years later, he had become a licensed victualler and the manager of the Castle Hotel in Abercrave, Ystradgynlais, less than 10 miles from Pontardawe.<sup>9</sup> The hotel had been operating in River Tawe valley since about the mid-19th century.<sup>10</sup>

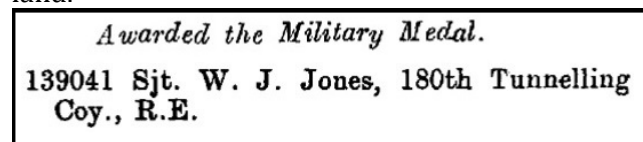
William enlisted to serve in the British Expeditionary Force early in the war<sup>11</sup> and on 18 May 1915 went overseas to France,<sup>12</sup> probably with the South Wales Borderers (regimental number 12252).<sup>13</sup> He later joined the 256th Tunneling Company of the Royal Engineers, established in July 1916, as the last of the tunnelling companies to be created.<sup>14</sup>



**Castle Hotel, Abercrave**  
Source: *Ystradgynlais & District*

The tunnelling units were occupied in offensive and defensive mining involving the placing and maintaining of mines under enemy lines, as well as other underground work such as the construction of deep dugouts for troop accommodation, the digging of subways, saps (a narrow trench dug to approach enemy trenches), cable trenches and underground chambers for signals and medical services.<sup>15</sup>

In June 1916, *The London Gazette* announced that William had been awarded the Military Medal, which was given to non-officers for gallantry and devotion to duty when under fire in battle on land.<sup>16, 17</sup>



**Sjt W. J. Jones Military Medal announcement**  
Source: *The London Gazette*

Sadly, William was injured and died of his wounds just over a year later. At the end of July 1917, the tunneling company was stationed in Bois d'Havrincourt, 17 km southeast of Cambrai in northern France.<sup>18</sup> The company's war diary records little of the soldiers' movements but, unlike most war diaries, includes news of both officers and non-officers in its accounts.

|    |                                                                                     |                                 |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 20 | N <sup>o</sup> 265500 P <sup>t</sup> RODERICK, J., 2 <sup>nd</sup> Monmouths Regt., | wounded in action by shell fire |
| 20 | Lieut. J. Y. HOOPER, R.E., joined the Company for duty.                             |                                 |
| 21 | N <sup>o</sup> 267357 P <sup>t</sup> DAVIES, A.J., 2 <sup>nd</sup> Monmouths Regt., | " " " " " "                     |
| 24 | N <sup>o</sup> 158450 Spr. BURTON, A.L., R.E.,                                      | " " " " " "                     |
| 27 | N <sup>o</sup> 139041 Sgt. JONES, W.J., R.E.,                                       | " " " " " "                     |
| 27 | N <sup>o</sup> 13410 P <sup>t</sup> NAYLOR, W., 7 <sup>th</sup> K.O.Y.L.I.,         | " " " " " "                     |

**Extract from war diaries of 256 Tunnelling Company, Royal Engineers**

Source: The National Archives

William was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 26 July 1917 with gunshot wounds to his back and buttocks. He died the following day and was buried in Oosthoek Military Cemetery on 29 July.<sup>19</sup>

The family was notified by the War Office:

Mr. and Mrs. Jones of the Castle Hotel Abercrave have received intimation from the War Office that their only son, Sergeant William Jones of the South Wales Borderers has been killed in action. Twelve months ago the deceased soldier was awarded the Military Medal for conspicuous bravery in the field. Prior to enlistment Sergeant Jones was employed at the International Colliery Abercrave but joined the colours soon after the outbreak of war and gained rapid promotion.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, the family received a letter of sympathy from 2nd Lieutenant H. J. Jeffreys of the Royal Engineers:

Please accept my heartfelt sympathy and also the sympathy of the Company as a whole, both officers and men, on the death of your son on active service.

I would have written before but as Sergeant Jones was taken to hospital, it is only lately that I have been informed of his death.

In your great trouble it is impossible for me to sympathise with you as I would like to; we have lost a gallant comrade and one of the most trustworthy Sergeants in the Company, but you have lost a son in which all your hopes and affections were centred and the only consolation you have is that he died doing his duty, that he faced death like a man, and like, the brave soldier he was.<sup>21</sup>

After the end of the war, William's remains and those of 24 other soldiers were removed from this cemetery and reinterred in Coxyde Military Cemetery (Plot II, Row L, Grave 11).<sup>22</sup> The cemetery is near Coxyde (now known as Koksijde) on the Belgian coast of the North Sea and was established by French troops. When Commonwealth forces relieved the French in June 1917, it became the most important Commonwealth cemetery on the Belgian coast.<sup>23</sup>



**Original gravemarker**  
Source: *Ystradgynlais History*



**Final gravemarker with sister  
Annie Elizabeth Morgan and her daughter**  
Source: *Ystradgynlais History*

In addition to his Military Medal, William was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914–15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).<sup>24</sup>

A website dedicated to the history of Ystradgynlais and district memorializes William's service.<sup>25</sup>

#### The Fallen of the Wars

**William John Jones**, son of the Manager of the Castle Hotel, Abercrave, served with the Royal Engineers in the First World War, and was promoted to Sergeant in January 1915, and was awarded the Military Medal in February 1917. He was killed in action on 28th July 1917, his death being reported in the local newspapers in mid August.

His parents, who ran the Castle Hotel, were John (born Carmarthen 1865, Hotel Manager) and Mary Ann Jones (born Rugby 1863). William John Jones was their only son and was born in c1892, and his sister was Annie Elizabeth, born in Abercrave in 1895. If this information comes from the 1911 census, then it shows that John Jones was managing the Castle Hotel in at least the period 1911 to 1917.

**William's Online Memorial**  
Source: *Ystradgynlais & District*

William's sister Anne married during the war, wedding Morgan Henry Morgan near Swansea, Glamorganshire, in the first half of the year. After the war, she and Morgan Henry were living with John and Mary Ann at the Castle Hotel, where John was still the licensed victualler. Morgan Henry Morgan was a colliery storekeeper.<sup>26</sup>

William's parents probably died in Ystradgynlais—Mary Ann in 1923<sup>27</sup> and John in 1926.<sup>28</sup> In 1939, Annie and her husband Morgan Henry were still living in Ystradgynlais.<sup>29</sup>

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## Reference Notes

- <sup>1</sup> "UK, Commonwealth War Graves, 1914–1921 and 1939–1947," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 7 April 2024), entry for Serjeant William John Jones
- <sup>2</sup> "England & Wales Marriages 1837–2005," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 7 April 2024), entry for John Jones, District: Neath, County: Glamorganshire, Volume: 11A, Page: 1080
- <sup>3</sup> "Glamorganshire, Wales, Anglican Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1570–1994," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 10 April 2024), entry for William John Lavan [sic] Jones, Record type: Baptism
- <sup>4</sup> "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 15 April 2025), entry for Annie E Morgan, Line number: 40, Schedule number: 209, Sub-schedule number: 2, Enumeration district: Xbkl, Registration district: 610. A

- <sup>5</sup> "GRO online index (birth)," *General Register Office* (<http://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/>: accessed 17 April 2024), entry for Jones, Annie Elizabeth, Registration district: Pontardawe, Volume: 11A, Page: 809
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- <sup>7</sup> "England & Wales births 1837–2006," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 6 May 2024), entry for Elsie May Jones, District: Pontardawe, County: Glamorganshire, Volume: 11A, Page: 1073; "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 6 May 2024), entry for Elsie May Jones, Death registration place: Pontardawe, Glamorganshire, Volume: 11a, Page: 620
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- <sup>9</sup> "1911 Wales Census," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 6 May 2024), entry for William John Jones, Registration district: Pontardawe, Registration district number: 593, Sub-registration district: Ystradgynlais, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 07, Household schedule number: 9, Piece: 32715
- <sup>10</sup> "Inns and Public Houses of Ystradgynlais," "The Castle Hotel, Caerbont," *Ystradgynlais & District* (<http://www.ystradgynlais-history.co.uk/>: accessed 8 May 2024)
- <sup>11</sup> Based on "War Gratuity Calculator" (<https://wargratitude.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/gratuity-calculator/>: accessed 18 May 2017); "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901–1929," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 6 May 2024), entry for William John Jones
- <sup>12</sup> "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 6 April 2024), entry for William J Jones
- <sup>13</sup> "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914–1919," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 6 April 2024), entry for William John Jones
- <sup>14</sup> "256th Tunnelling Company," *Wikipedia* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/256th\\_Tunnelling\\_Company](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/256th_Tunnelling_Company): accessed 6 May 2024)
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> "A Guide to British Awards for Gallantry or Meritorious Service in WW1," *The Great War* (<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/medals/ww1-gallantry-awards.htm#MM>: accessed 5 February 2024)
- <sup>17</sup> "The London Gazette," *The Gazette* ([www.thegazette.co.uk/](http://www.thegazette.co.uk/): accessed 9 May 2024), entry for Sjt. W. J. Jones, Publication date: 2 June 1916, Supplement: 29608, Page: 5593. *The London Gazette* entry refers to William being with the 180th Tunnelling Company of the Royal Engineers. No other evidence of his service with this company was found. The regimental number cited in *The London Gazette* confirms that this is the correct W.J. Jones.
- <sup>18</sup> "Army Troops, 256 Tunnelling Company Royal Engineers," *The National Archives* ([www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/): accessed 8 April 2024), War diaries, Date: 1916 July–1919 May, Reference: WO 95/488/10
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- <sup>20</sup> Ystradgynlais Wargraves, "Ystradgynlais History Articles," *Ystradgynlais History* (<http://www.ystradgynlais-history.co.uk/wargraves/>: accessed 9 May 2024), entry for William John Jones
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- <sup>22</sup> *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org): accessed 7 April 2024), entry for Serjeant William John Jones
- <sup>23</sup> *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org): accessed 7 April 2024), entry for Coxyde Military Cemetery
- <sup>24</sup> "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry*, entry for William J Jones
- <sup>25</sup> "The Castle Hotel, Caerbont," *Ystradgynlais & District*
- <sup>26</sup> "1921 Census Of England & Wales," *Findmypast* ([www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk): accessed 13 September 2025), entry for Edward Cox, Registration district: Pontardawe, Registration district number: 593, Sub-district: Ystradgynlais, Sub-district number: 2, Enumeration district number: 8, Archive series: RG 15, Piece number: 27097, Schedule number: 191, District reference: RD 593 RS 2 ED 7, 8
- <sup>27</sup> "Glamorganshire, Wales, Anglican Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1570–1994," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 May 2024), entry for Mary Ann Jones, Record type: Burial, Page: 156
- <sup>28</sup> "Glamorganshire, Wales, Anglican Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1570–1994," *Ancestry* ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk): accessed 9 May 2024), entry for John Jones, Record type: Burial, Page: 170
- <sup>29</sup> "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry*, entry for Annie E Morgan