

**PER ARDUA AD ASTRA**  
*Through Adversity to the Stars*

The formation of the Royal Air Force on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1918 would have been noted with interest in Farringdon. Gerald Atherton Williams, the second son of the Rector, Prebendary Philip Williams, was serving in the Royal Flying Corps on this historic day of amalgamation of the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service and so was a founder member of the RAF.

The Great War was still being bitterly fought at the time and Williams had joined the Devonshire Regiment as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant at the start of the war in 1914, straight from Exeter School and not yet 18.

In May 1916 a local newspaper reported that 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Williams had been injured and that ‘his right wrist was knocked about with a piece of shrapnel shell’.

By the time the RAF formed, Williams was a Lieutenant, acting Captain, and was working as a Reconnaissance Officer at 13 Wing HQ in the Western Front. He was later awarded the MBE for distinguished service and was Mentioned in Dispatches. The awards were ‘...*in recognition of special service with the Royal Air Force in France in 1918 when he returned to the front after being wounded.*’, so presumably this was during his time doing the dangerous artillery reconnaissance duty. Later he became a staff officer in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade of the RAF and was allowed to retain the rank of Captain. Captain Williams left the service in March 1919 and was invested with his MBE by the King early in 1920.

When Williams came back from the war he was listed on the Farringdon Memorial in the church porch with the 33 names of those who served. Having had his education interrupted by his war service after leaving Exeter School, he then went to Exeter College, Oxford. Interestingly, in 1921, together with an engineer, he applied for a patent for an improved cutlery and crockery washing machine. At the time his home address was still the rectory at Farringdon and his job was ‘Colonial civil servant’.

He joined the Nigerian Political Service in 1921 where he remained for sixteen years until his early death, starting out as an Assistant District Officer and later reaching the rank of District Officer. In July 1926 he

married Miss Helen Savill in Lagos Cathedral. She was the sister of Eric Savill who created the Savill Gardens in Windsor Great Park. He regularly reported his activities in Nigeria to the local newspapers when home on leave.

Like so many survivors of the Great War, his health was permanently impaired, and the Devon and Exeter Gazette reported his unexpected death at Topsham while on leave in September 1937 at the age of just forty. He was laid to rest beside his father in Farringdon churchyard on 9 September 1937.

Williams,,GA,Gerald Atherton,28.11.1896,,,,,AIR76-1,AIR  
76/549/216,308548,,000000,WILLIAMS

Patent <https://patents.google.com/patent/GB182943A/en>

[https://worldwide.espacenet.com/publicationDetails/biblio?DB=EP-ODOC&II=0&ND=3&adjacent=true&locale=en\\_EP&FT=D&date=19220714&CC=GB&NR=182943A&KC=A](https://worldwide.espacenet.com/publicationDetails/biblio?DB=EP-ODOC&II=0&ND=3&adjacent=true&locale=en_EP&FT=D&date=19220714&CC=GB&NR=182943A&KC=A)

[https://worldwide.espacenet.com/publicationDetails/originalDocument?CC=GB&NR=182943A&KC=A&FT=D&ND=4&date=19220714&DB=EP&DOC&locale=en\\_EP](https://worldwide.espacenet.com/publicationDetails/originalDocument?CC=GB&NR=182943A&KC=A&FT=D&ND=4&date=19220714&DB=EP&DOC&locale=en_EP)