

## PRIVATE WILFRED WALTER WATTS

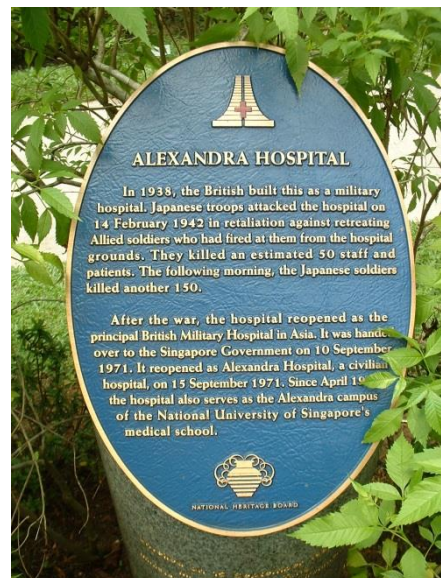
Wilfred was born on the 14 April 1910 and baptised at St James with Pockthorpe, Norwich on 25 May that year. He was the elder son of Alfred William, carpenter, and Florence Ellen (nee Short) of Barrack Street, Norwich, who had married the previous year. Wilfred's younger brother Donald was born in 1915, but died in 1918 aged 3. Florence had had 3 other children prior to her marriage to Alfred.

According to the 1931 electoral register, Wilfred was living with his mother in Poringland, 5 miles south of Norwich. It is not known what his employment was at that time. By the time of the 1939 Register he was an attendant working at the Home & Hospital for Jewish Incurables, which had been evacuated from Tottenham, London to Chesterford Park (Little Chesterford) at the outbreak of war in September 1939. He had met Mary Ann Thompson, known as Nancy, when working together at the Tottenham Hospital (she was a kitchen maid) and a few months after they had moved to Chesterford Park they were married in Norwich.



It is likely that Wilfred volunteered to join the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1939 (medical workers were not liable to conscription in WW2) as Private 7521383 and posted to 32 Company RAMC in Singapore, which was responsible for the Alexandra Military Hospital (designated formally as the British Military Hospital). This 1000 bed hospital was established in 1938 as the principal hospital for the British Far East Command.

The Japanese entered the war on 7 December 1941 with coordinated attacks on Pearl Harbour, Hong Kong and Singapore, which necessitated urgent British reinforcements in the Far Eastern theatre. It is not known whether Wilfred was already in Singapore or joined with the reinforcements. Overwhelming Japanese air and armoured supremacy pushed back the British, Indian and Australian forces in retreat down the Malayan peninsula and eventually they had to fall back to the island fortress of Singapore. On 15 February 1942 the 80,000 encircled forces surrendered, the largest surrender in British history. In addition to the military reverse, this surrender is considered a turning point in the British domination of the Far East. The fate of these prisoners of war was grim, but even before the surrender the medical staff and patients at the Alexandra Military Hospital were to suffer brutally at the hands of the Japanese troops. Between 14/15 February the advancing Japanese troops entered the hospital and massacred hundreds of staff and patients, including Wilfred - a harrowing eye witness account is at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/60/a8515460.shtml>



Wilfred is one of over 24,000 listed on the Singapore memorial in Kranji War Cemetery who has no known grave. The grave registration records his parents' names and his wife being of Great Chesterford.



Wilfred's widow Nancy continued to work at Chesterford Park until 30 May 1944, when an ammunition dump inappropriately situated half a mile (800 m) from the hospital caught fire and started a chain of small explosions. Luckily, the staff were warned about the danger and started to evacuate the patients. Nancy was one of those still in the building when there was a massive explosion, which threw her to the floor and covered her in plaster but she was uninjured. Despite the size of the explosion luckily there were no fatalities and few injuries, though Chesterford Park was damaged sufficiently for the hospital (including Nancy) to be moved to Luton for the remainder of the war. Nancy returned to Great Chesterford in 1948 and lived at 4 Jackson's Square until she died in 2011 aged 98 and was buried in All Saints' churchyard.

