



Ernest Cooper

Ernest Edward Cooper was born in Streatham in 1896.

His parents were Willie Bray Cooper and Annie Berry, and

they married in 1892 at St Mary's Newington.

Ernest's father's Army Service Records from 1885 indicate that he served with the British Army - possibly in Ireland, and his brother Willie Bray (Junior) joined the Royal Artillery in 1910 and participated in the Third Afghan War in 1919.

Maybe a soldier's life was in Ernest's blood!



Ernest Cooper (standing) - Photo sent as a postcard to his family. The other soldier was Harry Lawrence

At some point Ernest's parents separated. The 1901 Census records that Ernest was then four and living with his father Willie Bray - now a plumber, his seven-year-old brother and his Aunt Ellen (wife of Ernest Charles Cooper - Willie Senior's older brother), and Ellen's two sons at 14 Milford Road Twickenham/Brentford. His sister Ellen Agnus stayed with Annie, their mother, in Mitcham, Surrey. Ten years later, 14 year old Ernest is recorded as living at 42 Percy Gardens Isleworth - still with his Aunt Ellen (listed as a 'wife' and a laundress). We may never know the full story behind this family situation.

There are no surviving Army Records for Ernest but we know that he enlisted at Kingston Upon Thames. He joined 1st Battalion East Surrey Regiment and was given the regimental number 7007. **Ernest was about to embark on a most harrowing and arduous experience which would eventually cost him his life.**

The living conditions of the soldiers were appalling. Food consisted of 'sandbag stodge' or maybe Maconochie's stew (this could be warmed in the tin, raising little smoke so as not to attract the enemy). Tea was served in tins which had been used for fuel and tasted accordingly. Soldiers were often standing for hours in trenches which were waterlogged and infested with **rats and fleas**. Trench Fever was rife (high temperature and aching limbs) and the thick waterlogged mud caused 'trench foot' which often led to **gangrene**. Bitterly cold weather also made life unbearable particularly during the harsh winter of 1916/17.

The East Surrey Regiment and maybe Ernest too, fought in over twenty battles during the course of WW1. Ernest's last battle would be at Fresnoy which was part of the Arras Offensive. Fresnoy village was built on an elevated spur offering an excellent vantage point which the Germans desperately wanted. The village became the scene of fierce fighting and on 7th May 1917 the Germans launched a ferocious attack. 100,000 German shells rained down on the village and every known British position was gassed. Ernest died in this mayhem. Records state that he **died 'on or since 8th May 1917'** - sadly his body was never found. Ernest is commemorated at the Arras Memorial in France and St John's Church, Isleworth

