

## Charles Ernest Durston



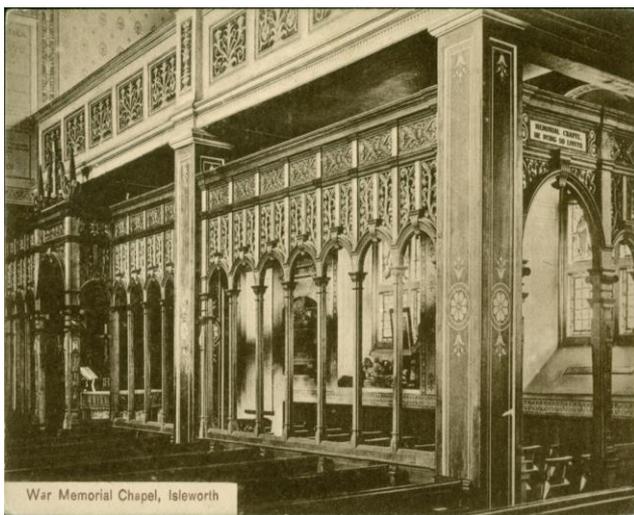
Charles Ernest Durston was born on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1887, the second of four children of James Carey Durston (1855-1895) and Harriett Sparkes (1859-1942). They had married on September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1881, at St Matthew's Church, Brixton; James was a dairyman, born in Somerset and Harriett was from Oxfordshire. Sadly James died in 1895, when Charles was just eight years old, leaving Harriett to bring up Albert Carey, Charles, Cicely Maude and James Frederick on her own. Charles attended St Mary's Infant School in Putney in 1892.

The 1901 census shows Harriett living in Battersea with nine years old Frederick and working as a charwoman. Albert, Charles and Cicely are in 86, Plough Road, Battersea, living with their uncle John Groves, a dairyman, and his wife Sarah, who was Harriett's sister. Charles and Albert are working for their uncle as milk carriers. In 1911, Charles and Albert are still working as milk carriers and living with their mother at 11, Strathblaine Road, St John's Hill, Clapham and Cicely is working in the family business as shop assistant and book- keeper with her aunt and uncle.

Charles was a private in the Royal Army Service Corps, and then enlisted in Dieppe in the 16<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers. The RASC was responsible for transport, supplies and equipment. The war diary of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion describes the details of army life in France in 1917 – 1918, as Charles would have experienced it. Working parties of up to 400 men were ordered to repair roads, to set up bathing facilities, to dig trenches, clean damaged trenches, drain water-logged trenches and create defences of concertina wire. They marched along, sometimes without incident, sometimes under heavy shelling or sniper fire. They issued whale oil to rub the soldiers' feet, and anti trench-foot powder. Clothing was treated with anti vermin grease. They had regular training sessions in attack practice formation, grenade throwing, bayonet fighting and musketry. On Sundays there was some light relief with church parade and service, often followed by organised games.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1918, Private Charles Durston (47215, formerly 2239, R.A.S.C), was killed in action at around the time of the First Battle of Arras. He was buried in Quesnoy Farm Military Cemetery and was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. His mother, Harriett received his effects, £117, 15s. 6d, and his place of residence was given as the family home at 68a Stapleton Road, Upper Tooting.

Charles was also honoured in the Memorial Chapel of All Saints in Church Street, Isleworth, before it was destroyed in a fire in 1943



War Memorial Chapel, Isleworth

The family had strong local connections: Charles's sister, Cicely Maude had married Frank Christian Cleaver in Brentford in 1916, and Charles's brother Frederick James (1892-1967), who had also served with the RASC and was discharged with malaria in 1919, living at 100 Wellington Road, Hounslow with his wife and their child. They continued to live there until after the late

forties; James was a sub postmaster in 1939. Charles's other brother Albert Carey (1884-1976) served with the British Red Cross as a night orderly at St Dunstan's in 1917, and in 1939 was living in Sheen Road, Richmond with his wife and also his mother, Harriet.