



Private Ernest Fox (G/9960) was born to Mary Ann Fox in 1889. Sadly, he started his short life in the **Staines Union Workhouse** in Stanwell (on the site of Ashford Hospital) where he is listed as a one year old, along with his two 'inmate' brothers John (7) and Robert (5). Mary is also an inmate. Robert and Ernest's baptismal records from St Mary the Virgin Staines, tell us that Mary is a 'single woman'. It is not clear how long Mary and her three sons were in the Work House. However, on May 26th 1895 their situation changed as Mary marries George Cray, a widower, at St Stephen's Parish Church in Hounslow, and happily signs the wedding certificate with a cross. At the time of their wedding both George and Mary are living in Whitton Road, Hounslow. The 1901 Census tells us that George was a garden labourer. Between them, the couple had seven children – Mary's three sons, John (now 18), Robert (15) and Ernest (11) and the Cray children:- Lottie (18), Jane (15), George (14) and William (11). The family are now living at Ivy Cottage in Worton Road. By 1911, Mary and George are settled at 30 Hartland Road, North Street, and all the children have left home except William.

There are no service records for Ernest. We know he joined the 4th Battalion Royal Fusiliers and that he first served in the Theatre of War on 1st April 1915. His first experience of war was probably at the Battle of Bellewaarde which took place on the 16th June 1915. Ernest would have witnessed a battlefield of 1,000 men dead, dying and wounded within a mere 12 hours. Ernest too, would lose his life the following year.

The village of St Eloi, near Ypres, was situated on higher ground which gave the Germans excellent views over the British trenches and roads. The surrounding land had also been churned up by previous mine explosions and was still water-logged from the winter. On the 27th March 1916 at 04.15am and in preparation for the battle ahead, the British detonated huge mines that were heard in Kent. The explosion immediately wiped out notable land marks - planned to aid the soldiers in their run forwards - and collapsed trenches on both the German and the British lines. The 4th Royal Fusiliers struggled to reach their objectives as the boggy ground was difficult to transverse. The battle ended on 3rd April with a 'successful' British outcome. **Ernest was assumed 'killed in action' on the first day.** His body was never found. Ernest is commemorated on the Menin Gate at Ypres, Panel 6 & 8, He is also remembered on the All Saints Memorial in Church Street, Isleworth. He left £4 3s 6d to his mother Mary Ann. Ernest was awarded the Victory and British Medal and the 15 Star. He was 27.



Courtesy National Army Museum