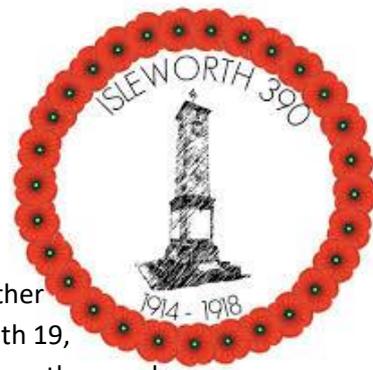


## J Gray (1897-1918)



Joseph Gray was born on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1896 to parents Thomas and Jane Gray (nee Speller). Baby Joseph was baptised four days later at St Mark Church, Marlybone. His father Thomas was born in Peckham and his mother Jane in Taunton Somerset. The couple, both 19, had married on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1890 at St Mary's Church in West Kensington near to where the couple were living at 8 St Clements Road. Jane gave birth to a daughter Harriett and later Ellen. The family then moved to the Notting Hill area where, in 1897 their first son and future soldier, Joseph, was born. Thomas Gray was working as a carman (a man that had a horse and cart or a wagon for transporting goods). Two more children John and Lily arrived, so by 1901 their mother Jane was looking after 5 children under 8 years old! The family were probably on a very limited budget which may be why the family have taken on a boarder. Between 1901 and 1911, the family moved from 135, Blyth Road Hammersmith to 17 Vine Place Hounslow. Father Thomas is now listed as a labourer and James and Melia Elizabeth have been born.

In 1911 Joseph (now 14) was working as an Errand Boy. Three years later, in August 1914 an article in the Middlesex Chronicle reported that Jo Gray (of Vine Place Hounslow) was summoned to court for gambling. PC 704T saw the defendant at the Militia Fields playing pitch and toss...but Jo denied he was gambling. He was fined 10 shillings. In November 1914, a few months after this event, Joseph's Army Records indicate that he had volunteered to join the 8<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion Middlesex Regiment (Territorial Force) - maybe Joseph knew that he needed a sense of direction. When he volunteered, he entered his age as 19 when he was really only 17! Fortunately Joseph's army service records have survived the 1940 fire, but they are complex and difficult to read.

On 25<sup>th</sup> May 1915, about six months after he volunteered, Joseph enlisted to serve his country and prepare for deployment on operations (known as 'embodied service' in Territorial terminology). During his years of service, Joseph transferred to a number of battalions within the Middlesex (Duke of Cambridge) Regiment. However his regimental number remained the same 242797. In July 1915 Joseph was posted to Gibraltar. A month later, he left for Egypt, where he served with the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force for nine months. From there he was posted to France for six months. It appears he was then back on British soil before returning to France in May 1917. On 11<sup>th</sup> December '17, Joseph's army records indicate that he had been wounded although it is not clear exactly where this wounding occurred. The 19<sup>th</sup> Middlesex War Diaries record that the Battalion was sent to Northern Italy, as urgent reinforcements at the River Piave. The crisis soon passed and the Battalion was 'hurried back to the western Front by train in early March'. Joseph was wounded in Italy. On the night of 23<sup>rd</sup> March Joseph's regiment were in a defensive position at Beugnatre. The war diary continues.... *'The enemy attacked our position at abt. 6pm (24<sup>th</sup>) – compelled to withdraw to Biefvillers'. Enemy attacked our position in the morning (25<sup>th</sup>). Troops on right flank withdraw leaving our right exposed. Battalion held on to our position & inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy until compelled to withdraw to Achiet-Le-Petit.' Battalion (26<sup>th</sup>) in reserve line.*

Joseph was clearly a hard-working, experienced and dedicated soldier. He went 'missing' in the dark and early hours of 26<sup>th</sup> March 1918. His body was never found. Joseph was awarded the Victory and British Medals and the 15 Star and he left his sole legacy to his mother Jane. He is commemorated at the Arras Memorial Bay 7 and on St Bridget's Church Memorial in Isleworth. **Joseph was 22.**

