



Corporal Alfred John Roberts's parents, Alfred and Edith, had married at St Mary's Church in Putney in 1887 and Alfred John was born in 1889. Interestingly, the 1891 Census records that Edith was living with her parents in Cricklade, Wiltshire, with Alfred J. (2yrs) and also Elizabeth Emma (1yr). Edith's 'carpenter' husband was probably working in West London to keep his family. By 1901, the Roberts were again living together at 37 Archway Street, Barnes. Alfred J., now 12, had two more sisters, Edith and Ethel. The 1911 census records that Marjorie and baby Clarence had been added to the family and their older brother Alfred J. was now a Metropolitan Police Constable, also living in Barnes, and had been working in Bow for the last three years.

Alfred served as a police constable for 8 years before joining the Royal Naval Air Service on 19th January 1916 (RNAS service No.F11044). He joined up "for the duration of the war". He served in France from May to December of that year, working as a Leading Mechanic. It also seems possible that Alfred J. had served in East Africa. In April 1918 the RNAS became the Royal Air Force. Alfred's new service number was 211044 and he was attached to the 16th 'Kite' Balloon Base where he worked as a rigger of airships.

The term 'kite' refers to the fact that the balloons were tethered to the ground. The balloons provided an observation post above the battlefield enabling those on the ground to gain vital information about troop movements and artillery positions. Observations were passed down to the ground by telephone. Riggers needed to know the proper methods of securing cables to other objects without the possibility of slipping. The cables also allowed the balloons to be retrieved. Balloons were used extensively in London preventing enemy aircraft from low flying.

There are place names mentioned in Alfred's records, Merrifield, HMS Daedalus, Cranwell, and Roehampton, but Torpoint in Cornwall is probably where the men of 16th Balloon Base called 'home'.

It is also particularly sad and shocking to note that Alfred was 'found drowned' in the River Thames at Richmond whilst on leave. Alfred's death certificate records that he died on 24th October 1918 just 18 days before the armistice. He was 30 and is buried in Isleworth Cemetery (U.BA.52)

At the time of Alfred J.'s death, his parents Alfred and Edith lived at 37 Haliburton Road. Alfred's brother Clarence, was named as Alfred's Next of Kin.

natural causes.

FROM THE RIVER.

The third inquiry was on the body of a soldier taken from the river on Thursday. Alfred Roberts, Haliburton-road, East Twickenham, identified the body as that of his son, a corporal in the R.N.A.S., 30 years of age. He had served in East Africa, where he had contracted malarial fever, and had lately been employed as drill instructor in Cornwall. He had recently been on leave, and left a fortnight ago to return to duty. Witness next heard he was missing.

Edward Brain, waterman, St. James's-cottages, said that shortly before 4 o'clock on Thursday morning he saw the body floating in the river, and secured it. It was fully dressed, and had a mackintosh on.

Police-constable Colborn also gave evidence.

Dr. Gardiner, the Green, said that he examined the body, and found that death was caused by drowning. He thought that Roberts had struck the bottom of the river when he fell in, as there was the mark of a blow on the skull. The body had been in the water for about ten days.

The Coroner returned a verdict of "Found drowned."

