

WILLIAM ARTHUR SIMMONDS



William Arthur Simmonds (Reg. No. 8218) was born in Isleworth in the spring of 1896. His family home was in Church Street – first living at No. 11 (1901) and then at No. 54 (1911) - near All Saints Church and flanking the river which was the source of his father's employment. When William was born his father, Arthur (known as 'Tich') was a waterside labourer but soon advanced to become the ferryman at Isleworth, a position he was to hold for possibly 15 years. William's mother, Amy, nee Gilbert, contributed to the family's income through her work as a laundry worker. Unusually for families at this time, the Simmonds had only one child, William. Research has shown that It is highly likely that he was the Simmonds who attended The Blue School and appeared on a group photo C1905 (above).



William is thought to have enlisted at or soon after the start of the Great War, in 1914. He joined the 11th(Service) Battalion, Royal Fusiliers (City of London) which was formed in Hounslow as part of the Second New Army. The beginnings of this Battalion were rather chaotic, lacking officers, NCOs and vital equipment; this may in part explain how it was that William, at the tender age of 20, held the rank of Sergeant. He and his comrades would certainly have been excited when they were honoured by an inspection on June 24th 1915 by King George V.

The 11th were mobilised for war on 30 July; they were to engage in several major battles on the Western Front, where they fought until the end of the War. The first large offensive mounted by this Reserve Army during the battle of the Somme was the battle of Thiepval Ridge. The Anglo-French armies fought long and hard at Thiepval, with their effectiveness hindered by deteriorating weather and organisational difficulties. Thiepval Ridge in particular was well fortified and the German defenders fought with great determination. Initial engagements were perilous, and grew the more so as days passed.

Thiepval village was the first target, on 23rd September 1916, with the 11th given the dangerous task of mopping up cellars and bunkers; many 'moppers-up' were to lose their lives. By 2.30pm on the 26th the Ridge had been almost totally taken. German accounts of the battle concluded that the success of the 11th in its engagements was a major factor in the British victory. Sadly, William did not survive to celebrate this triumph; he was killed in action and gave his life for his country this day. He is buried in Lonsdale Cemetery, Authuille, south west of Thiepval, and is also remembered on his parents' gravestone in Isleworth Cemetery and in the Memorial Chapel at All Saints. He was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. In a sad footnote to his short life, it is recorded that William left his mother, Amy, the sum of £19 0s 6d. Just four years later William's father Arthur died aged 50. His mother Amy must have lived with deep sadness for more than 25 years at the loss of her young son and husband, she died in 1949.



Inscribed - For King & Country