

Arthur Edward Webster

We suppose that the A E Webster on the war memorial is Private Arthur Edward Webster from West Ealing: he also appears on the war memorial panels of the Territorial Army Drill Hall in Hanworth Road, Hounslow, and with the full name in the All Saints Church Isleworth memorial list, although he never appears to have lived in Isleworth.



His father was William Joseph Webster, a jobbing gardener, and his mother Annie, nee Simpson. They lived at 29 Northfield Road, West Ealing. Arthur was the 5th of their 7 children. In 1911, aged 14, he was working as a fishmonger along with two of his older brothers.

His service record has survived in the 'burnt records'. He enlisted, with his brother, John Stanley Simpson Webster, on 13th January 1915 in the Territorial 2/8th Battalion, Middlesex Regiment, at Hounslow. They have consecutive service numbers. (Their eldest brother William George Clifford Webster was in the Army Service Corps.) They embarked for Gibraltar on 1st February, to replace a unit of the regular army, and first saw action in Egypt from August 1915 to May 1916, engaged in operations against the Senussi. Preparatory to the 'Big Push', the battalion landed in Marseilles, France, on 15th May; because of typhus on board they were quarantined for a few weeks before proceeding to Rouen, en route to the Somme. The 2/8th was disbanded and on 25th May they were attached to the 1/8th Battalion Middlesex, which was involved for the next few nights in digging a new trench in No Man's Land, an achievement described as 'extraordinary' in Wyrall's history of the Middlesex Regiment, 'The Die-Hards in the Great War'.

On 26th June 1916 Arthur was wounded in action (in the face and chest) and hospitalised for a few weeks. He returned to the Front on 25th July, now attached to the 1st Battalion, which had recently lost over 400 men (killed, wounded or missing). According to the battalion's war diary, days of rigorous training followed for the hundreds of reinforcements – practising woodland fighting, skirmishing and night operations. In mid-August for a few days they were

in the trenches on the front line in High Wood, frequently under shell fire. Work continued with hardly any rest by day or night, digging and improving the trenches and shelters. After that they were in reserve, supplying working parties, digging trenches in Mametz Wood, and carrying explosives, rations and other supplies to the front line through the communication trenches – all very dangerous work, close to where the Battle of Delville Wood was raging. One night they were bombarded by poison gas shells.

Arthur Webster was killed in action on 27th August, aged 19. He is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme and was also remembered in the Memorial Chapel at All Saints Church, Isleworth.

