

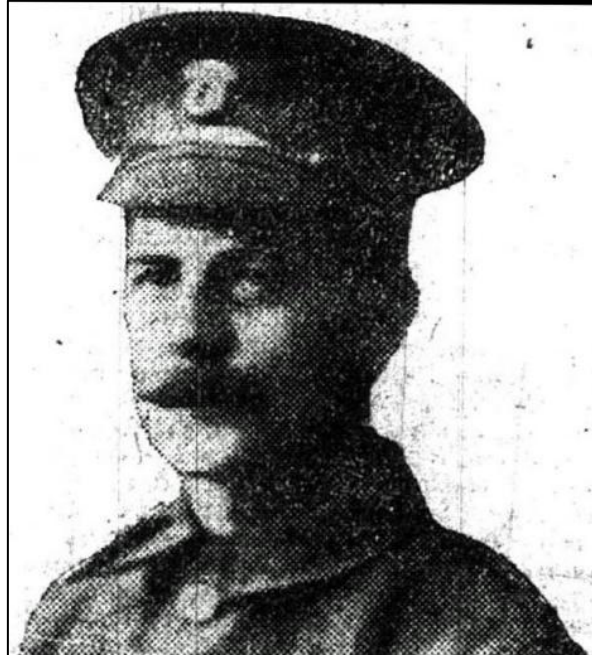
Private Arthur Timmis

8629

1st Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers

9th Brigade, 3rd Division

died 1st April 1916



Arthur Timmins, was born in the Autumn of 1883 in Hoobrook. He was the son of Henry Thomas Timmis born around 1847 in Hartlebury and Eliza, born around 1847 in Worcester. Arthur was the second youngest of nine children. The older siblings George, Emily, Ann Elizabeth, Alice, Helen, Rose and Frank were all born in Worcester while his younger sister, Charlotte, was also born in Hoobrook. Arthur's family had moved to Hoobrook around 1880. They later moved to Mill Cottage Stone by 1891 and then to 57 Peel Street in Kidderminster by 1901.

Arthur's father was a Steam Engine Fitter and by 1891 his mother and elder sisters were all working in the carpet industry. Arthur's first known occupation, in 1901 at the age of 17, was as a Brickhouse Labourer.²

At some point after this, Arthur enlisted in the 1st Battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers. His service number suggests that this might have been as early as mid-1902 but this is not certain. All that is certain is that in 1908 Arthur was in India. The 1st Battalion was based in Peshawar from 1905³ and we know that Arthur was awarded the India General Service Medal 1908 for his service on the North West Frontier.⁴ In that year, Arthur's regiment was involved in the Mohmand Expedition in the hills north of Peshawar.⁵

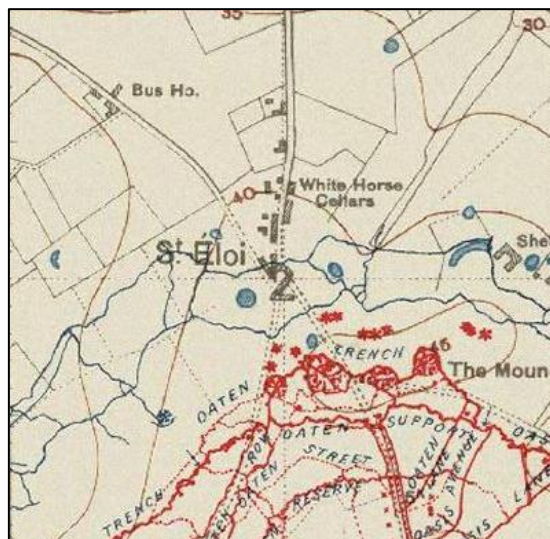
Arthur does not appear on the 1911 census for England and my supposition is that his regiment was still in India. However, by the Autumn of 1911 he was back in Kidderminster and sometime before Christmas he married Florence M Pritchard. The couple had two sons – Leonard, born in spring of 1912 and Harold, born in the summer of 1914. At some point before the war Arthur worked at Kidderminster Goods Station and his family lived in South Street, just off George Street, in Kidderminster.⁶

Sadly, Arthur's service record did not survive so the next fact we are sure of is that he went to France on 27th October 1914. The 1st Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers was based at

Portsmouth at the outbreak of the Great War and sailed very quickly to France on 14th August so it seems likely that Arthur was part of the army reserve and was called up to rejoin his unit.

Arthur's battalion served with the 9th Brigade as part of the 3rd Division of the British Expeditionary Force. The unit fought on the Western Front throughout the conflict and saw action in most of the major battles such as The Battle of Mons, The Battle of Le Cateau, The Battle of the Marne, The Battle of the Aisne, at La Bassée, Messines and the First Battle of Ypres. They also took part in various operations during the winter of 1914-15, The First Attack on Bellewaarde and the Actions at Hooge.⁷

By Spring of 1916, Arthur and his battalion were in Belgium near St Eloi, which is south of the town of Ypres on the road towards Messines. It was an area where the enemy held positions on higher ground than that of the British troops and had seen heavy fighting in 1915 when 33 mines had been exploded in an attempt to destroy enemy positions. By late March 1916 the effects of the explosions and shellfire meant the terrain was very difficult for an infantry assault and was also still waterlogged from the winter.



St Eloi sector Spring 1917

German trenches (red) and mine craters south of the village.

The craters formed by mine explosions on 27th March 1916 are those in the German front line.

Action began on 27th March 1916. This had been designed as a retaliatory blow for earlier attacks by the enemy. Arthur's 9th Brigade was chosen - it was the only one available - and on 26th March, a very cold night with snow and sleet falling saw the men of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers taking whatever cover they could.

At 4.15am, mines exploded and the artillery bombardment started at the same time, specifically planned to maintain an element of surprise. The infantry advanced 30 seconds later, coming in from the side to avoid the four large craters which had been formed. Arthur's battalion reached the German wire with the loss of only one man but other units involved in the fighting fared less well. The enemy artillery responded quickly and shellfire soon started and the situation became very confused. Troops who had been intending to join the attack were held back by the shellfire. It also started to rain heavily and water levels rose in trenches and craters.

These conditions were such that the men holding the new front had to be relieved after short periods and no further advance was possible. Heavy shellfire by both sides continued until 15th April, but by then it was clear that the craters from the original attack were now part of the German front and the allies decided to consolidate its current position - back where things started.⁸



**Actions of St. Eloi Craters. Troops of the Northumberland Fusiliers, 3rd Division, wearing German helmets and gas masks captured at St. Eloi, 27th March 1916
Imperial War Museum image Q495⁸**

It was during this action that Arthur died on 1st April 1916. After his death, in June 1916, his widow received a payment of 13s 4d, which was the final balance of pay owed to Arthur, and later in 1919 a war gratuity of £9.⁹

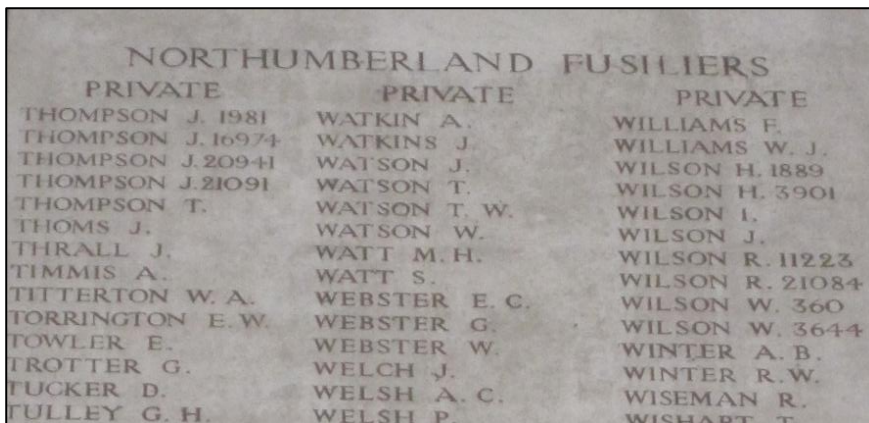
Arthur's body was never found and, like all the other men who died in the same are, he is commemorated on one of the most famous of all First World War memorials – the Menin Gate in Ypres – which lists the names of more than 54,000 officers and men. The memorial was designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield with sculpture by Sir William Reid-Dick and was unveiled 24th July 1927.



The Menin Gate¹⁰



Menin Gate Panel 12



Close up of Menin Gate Panel 12 with Arthur Timmis' name

References

Please note that these references refer to all information in the preceding paragraphs since the previous reference, not just to the immediate sentence in which the reference number appears.

1. Photo from The Kidderminster Shuttle, 12th August 1916
2. Census documents: <http://home.ancestry.co.uk/>
3. <http://armyservicenumbers.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/northumberland-fusiliers-regular.html>
4. Military records: <http://home.ancestry.co.uk/>

5. http://www.northeastmedals.co.uk/british_regiment/northumberland_fusiliers.htm
6. The Kidderminster Shuttle, 12th August 1916
7. <http://www.wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/allied/battalion.php?pid=1027>
8. <http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/battles>
9. Register of soldiers effects: <http://home.ancestry.co.uk/>
10. <http://www.cwgc.org/>