

Arthur Reginald Meredith

Private

37386

13th Battalion, Royal Scots (Lothian Regiment)



Born in the early part of 1880 Arthur Reginald Meredith was the 4th of 14 children born to James and Winifred Meredith. Arthur was the older brother of Ernest Mitchell Meredith who was killed at Gallipoli in 1915. The family lived at 3 High Street, Kington where James ran the towns ironmongers store. Arthur attended Lady Hawkins School and showed an excellent aptitude for engineering. In the 1901 census we find that Arthur and his older brother Frederick have left home and are lodging at 142 Kent Road, Kelvin in the centre of Glasgow. Arthur is 21 and employed as a Marine Engineering Apprentice and his brother, 22, is an Electrical Fitter. The Kington Times reports that for some time prior to the war Arthur worked for the Cunard Steamship Company.

In the Lady Hawkins's School summary of the year 1914, published in the 19th December edition of the Kington Times, they are proud to announce a list of Old Boys serving under the colours, Arthur is one of those whose name is recorded. This perhaps indicates that Arthur enlisted early in the conflict, but what we do know for sure is that Arthur enlisted in Barrow-in-Furness into the 4th Battalion the Argyll and Southern Highlanders as Private 9426 Meredith. As I said earlier the Meredith family were large and in the 8th May 1915 edition of the Kington Times James, Arthur's father, is proud to record that he has five sons serving and two further boys working in the munitions sector. James Henry, the eldest, was a Private in the Kings Shropshire Light Infantry, next there was Arthur followed by his younger brother Ernest serving in the Royal Buckinghamshire Hussars, Private John Meredith was in the 10th Battalion the Royal Sussex Regiment and finally Arthur's youngest brother Herbert was serving as a Gunner in the Royal Field Artillery. The two brothers not

working directly in the forces were Frederick, working as an armaments electrician in Sheffield and the youngest brother in the family, Cyril, who was Works Manager at Handley Page, the first British aircraft manufacturers, based at Cricklewood on the outskirts of London. No one could accuse the Meredith family of not contributing to the war effort.

The 4th Battalion Argyll and Southern Highlanders was a recruiting and training unit and as such never saw action directly. Sadly very few of Arthur's service records survive but his Medal Index Card states that he entered France on the 22nd September 1914. We also know that by May 1915 he had advanced to the rank of Lance Corporal. When Arthur was transferred out of the Argyll and Southern Highlanders is unknown but we do know that, at some point, he was moved to the Royal Scots (Lothian) Regiment and his service number changed to 37386. The Royal Scots were the senior line infantry regiment of the British Army, Arthur would surely have been proud to be serving with such an illustrious regiment.

Through the spring and early summer of 1918 the Germans pushed forward and forced the allied armies to retreat toward Paris. This big push was to become known as the German Spring Offensive. However, on the 8th of August 1918 their advance was halted and the allies started forcing the enemy back. This counter attack did not stop until the armistice was achieved on the 11th November 1918. It was during this immense struggle to halt the German advance that Arthur and the 13th Royal Scots, were involved. In researching the Lothian Regiment we discover they were involved in the Battle of Soissonais between the 18th and 22nd of July 1918. This battle was led by the French with support from the Americans and some British Divisions. Ferdinand Foch, the Allied Supreme Commander, planned a major counter-offensive for the 18 July. Involved were 24 French Divisions, several British Divisions and the Buffalo Soldiers, 92nd Infantry Division (United States), then under French command. This formidable force was supported by further allied troops including eight large U.S. Divisions, under U.S. command, and 350 tanks. The objective of the battle was to eliminate the salient that was aimed at Paris and to turn the tide of the German Spring Offensive. The assault was a success but resulted in total casualties on both sides amounting to nearly 300,000 injured or killed.

Arthur survived the Battle of Soissonais and with the Lothian Regiment continued to be heavily involved in the push to victory. He eventually met his death at Loos-en-Gohelle, a small mining town to the north of Lens. Loos-en-Gohelle is now more familiarly known as simply Loos. The Battle of Loos of 1915 had taken the lives of many fighting men and one specific area around the quarries of Loos was particularly aggressively fought over and became infamous. Here again, on the 12th of September 1918, 3 years after the Battle of Loos, the Royal Scots found themselves facing the enemy and again having to take those same quarries. An excerpt from the book by Major John Ewings entitled "*The Royal Scots 1914 - 1919*", provides an impression of the action on that fateful day.

"Opposite the battalion front at the beginning of September were the Quarries, which acquired a grim fame during the Battle of Loos in 1915,

and at 5 A.M. on the 12th [of Sept 1918] "D" Company moved forward into them and established a line of posts. This occupation was vigorously disputed by the Boches, and at 2 P.M. Captain Kelly and his company, finding that they were working round the flanks, were obliged to fight their way back to their original lines, bringing with them two prisoners. Next day "A" Company took the Quarries and held them against a number of German bombing attacks during the night.....Thus, though there was no big battle, the experience of the 13th Royal Scots in the line during September was not devoid of risk or adventure".

Arthur Reginald Meredith was '**killed in action**' on the 12th of September 1918, he was 38 years old. His death is commemorated at The Loos Memorial, panels 10 and



Loos Memorial

13, located in Dud Corner Cemetery just outside Loos-en-Gohelle, Pas de Calais. This memorial commemorates 20000 men who have no known grave. The cemetery is believed to have been called Dud Corner due to the large number of unexploded shells found in the area after the Armistice. The cemetery stands on the sight of a German strong point captured by the 15th (Scottish) Division. It is very apt that he

should be commemorated at the site of the Divisions greatest achievement.

I thought it might prove interesting to discover how all the other Meredith boys fared during the war and after. I think it is fair to say that throughout the four years of conflict the family endured great sadness and loss. Firstly Ernest was killed at Gallipoli and the next shock to afflict the family was on the 23rd October 1917 when the patriarch of the family, James, passed away at the age of 77. Then of course Arthur was killed right at the end of the conflict. With so many family members fighting, the Meredith's were fortunate that there were no other losses. However, not all the boy's transited the war unscathed.

Arthur's oldest brother James Henry had already seen service in South Africa with the Kings Shropshire Light Infantry during the Boer War. Having left, time served, on 6th June 1902, he was one of the first men to re-enlist at the outbreak of war. James was posted to the 48th Training Reserve Battalion but in December 1916 transferred to the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment and served in Bangalore, India. In August 1917 he was despatched to Mesopotamia finally returning to England on the 14th April 1918. James was finally released from the army on the 7th September 1918, time served, and again placed on the reserve list. He was then 41 years old.

The service records of Arthur's younger brother John Arnold Meredith survive and from these we find he enlisted into the 10th Depot Regiment of the Royal Sussex

Regiment in October 1914. John entered France on the 1st of June 1915 and a couple of months later requested to be moved to the Royal Engineers. His request was granted and he joined the 189th Special Company (Pioneer Corp) and in addition was promoted to Corporal. But on the 11th December 1915 he received a gunshot wound to his ear and his record also states he was gassed. John survived the war and in March 1919 was demobbed to go and live back at the Meredith family home, Llanfair House in Kington. John was obviously affected by his experiences throughout the war which led him to apply for a disability pension due to 'confusional insanity'. His mental capacity was assessed by the army and they came to the decision that he was 100% not insane and therefore rejected his claim. One wonders if shell shock may have been evident in John's case and perhaps today he would have been treated more sympathetically.

Arthur's younger brother Herbert survived the war, the same can hardly be said for his service record. Many WW1 records were destroyed or damaged during German air raids in WW2, Herbert's has been badly damaged and deciphering it is difficult. Gunner 24469 Meredith enlisted on the 2nd September 1914 and joined the 59th Brigade Royal Horse Artillery, 'D' Battery. He was promoted to Bombardier on 17th January 1916 and left the army on the 31st January 1919. Not much else can be seen, but at least he survived the ordeal.



Cyril Wright Meredith 1912

Arguably the youngest son of James and Winifred, Cyril Wright Meredith, achieved the highest accolades. From a young age Cyril had always been interested in engineering and in particular that new invention, the aeroplane. Like his older brother Ernest he attended Bancrofts School in Woodford Green and upon leaving, in 1909, acquired a position as a construction engineer at Handley Page, aircraft manufacturers. On 5th March 1912, while serving with the London Balloon Company RE he flew a Short biplane out of Eastchurch in Kent and

became only the second Territorial Force, Non-Commissioned Officer to gain his pilots' certificate from the Royal Aero Club. By 1913 he was Works Manager at Handley Page and in 1922 worked on the design of the V1500 Heavy Bomber, by then he was their Chief Engineer. He left Handley Page and established his own business, Aircraft Materials Limited, selling aircraft parts. During the Second World War the company was heavily involved in supplying parachute harnesses to the ministry. Cyril wound the company up in 1960 and upon retirement often returned to Kington and became an active member of the Radnorshire Society. In 1963, while exploring the quarries at Burlingjobb, Cyril discovered the remains of an old Kington tramway cart on a spoil tip. The tram was saved, restored and is now exhibited in Hereford Museum, Resource and Learning Centre as an example of the Counties industrial heritage and



Handley Page V1500 Heavy Bomber

is one of the oldest examples of a horse drawn tram in the country. Cyril passed away in Hillingdon, London in 1970.

And so, to close this piece, we return to Arthur and a mystery surrounding his marital status. Some records suggest that he married a Bertha Cockerham in 1915. Their Banns were read out through June 1915 at St Paul's in Leeds but a marriage certificate is conspicuous by its absence. No record of their marriage can be found. Certainly after Arthur's death, in military records, Bertha is referred to as his wife and is living at 34 Clarendon Road, Morecambe in Lancashire. Probate for Arthur was finalised on the 1st August 1919 in Leeds and by that date Bertha was living at 10 Bexley Mount, Bayswater Road, Leeds. His estate of £327 15s 5d (£7000 today) passed to Bertha and she is referred to as his widow. Some years later, on the 17th January 1926, a Bertha Meredith marries a Hugh McFadden in Lancaster, this is surely the same Bertha. A small mystery which will eventually be resolved, I'm sure.

Arthur came so close to surviving the war and having served through nearly the whole conflict it must have been a bitter blow for the family when he was killed just before the end. The town of Kington were justly proud of his efforts and at a Peace Service held in St Mary's church on Sunday 26th July 1919 his and 59 other names were read out. For his long service and sacrifice Arthur was awarded the Victory and British War Medals and also the 1914 Star with Clasp (The Mons Star).



Mons Star Trio