

Ernest Wright - (1887-1918)

The last two men, whose names appear on the St Aldates War Memorial, were in-fact the last of four pair of brothers to appear, with the penultimate name on the Memorial belonging to Ernest John Wright. Born in the parish of St Aldates (*possibly in St Aldates Street*) Ernest was born on Monday 21 February 1887 the eldest of eight children born to manual labourer John Wright and his wife of just a few months, Mary Bardrick. John and Mary had married the previous spring and originally they had come from different counties as John Wright was born in 1855, and he had originated from Gas Street in St Ebbes as the son of a labourer, whilst his wife Mary had originally come from the mainly agricultural village of Grendon Underwood in Buckinghamshire, where she was born as Mary Bardrick in circa 1862, the daughter of a farm labourer. John and Mary had probably first come together after she had moved into the city of Oxford where she found employment as a domestic servant, yet it seems likely that John and Mary had travelled to her home village to be married, as was the custom in those days.

Ernest Wright was baptised at St Aldates Church on 3 April 1887, and unbeknown to him at the time, he was born into an unfortunate family, as four of his seven siblings, *Mabel, George, Edith and an unnamed child* would all die in infancy, with his brother George being the eldest aged just fourteen months. By the April of 1891, Ernest and the Wright family were living in the long since demolished Isis Street; where on the other side of St Aldates Street and almost opposite the entrance to Isis Street stood St Aldates School, where Ernest first attended the Infants in 1892 before the completion of his formal education at the Boys School around 1901.

By this time Ernest had almost certainly finished his education as it was during the spring of that year that he's recorded as working as a '*porter in a bookshop*' at the age of fourteen. With the Wright family now living at Marlborough Road in Grandpont, Ernest was living with his parents John who was working as a *river-dredger*, and Mary, plus his surviving sisters Nelly aged six, and Margaret aged three, and his younger brother Arthur aged five. After beginning his employment as a *book shop porter* in his early-teens, Ernest moved into the printing trade and he began working as a compositor; possibly for a Mr *Sweatman* of New Inn Hall Street where his brother Arthur is also known to have later been employed as a compositor.

A few years later, - around the time of his marriage to Ethel Silvester (*which was held at St Aldates Church on Boxing Day - 26 December 1910*) Ernest, at the age of twenty-three, was described on his marriage certificate as a '*printer*', yet this may have simply been a broader generalisation of his occupation as on all other records he was described as being a *compositor* or as a *printer-compositor*. The future Mrs Ernest Wright was born as Ethel May Silvester on the 30 December 1885 in the parish of New Hinksey (*possibly Lake Street*) a third daughter of the twice married William Silvester, who at the time of her birth, was employed as a labourer at the gas works in St Ebbes, and his much younger wife Mary, who was at least ten years his junior. Although it appears that Ethel was raised in the New Hinksey area, by the time of the 1901 census, Ethel was recorded as living as a boarder and scholar at the Convent of Holy Trinity School on the Woodstock Road. Within a few weeks of their marriage, it appears that Ernest and Ethel had moved to the east-end of London, and on the census of April 1911, they were living at 8 Dunmow Road in West Stratford, where Ernest had a recorded occupation of '*printer-compositor*'. Exactly for how long he had remained living in the East-end of London is unclear, but Ernest and Ethel had certainly returned to Oxford by September 1912, when Ernest began working for a Mr *R. Spender* as a motor driver for the St John's Ambulance.

Mostly driving a car (*although he also drove an Ambulance from time to time*), Ernest was to spend just over four years working as a driver, and it was during this period, that his only son Reginald John William was born at St Mary's Road in Cowley on 1 February 1915, although

rather strangely, at the time of his baptism at St Aldates a month later, Reginald's father was described as a 'gardener', with his home address recorded as Kennington Lane in Berkshire. Whether Ernest had taken temporary employment as a gardener isn't clear, but it was just a few months later, at the time of his enlistment, which took place in October 1915, that Ernest was again employed as a driver.

Entering a local recruitment office at 47 High Street in Oxford, Ernest Wright applied to join the Mechanised Transport section of the Army Service Corps, and at his medical on 5 October 1915, he was described as being twenty-eight years - eight months of age, with a height of 5ft 4½ inches tall, dark brown hair, grey eyes and a thirty-four inch chest measurement (*with 2½ inch expansion*). Ernest also had what was described as a fresh complexion, and his recorded weight was 110.lbs (*less than eight stone*) with his physical development described as 'good'.

Enlisting on 11 October 1915, Ernest joined the Army Service Corps with a service number of M2/131588, and just three days later, he arrived at the A.S.C depot at Grove Park, where he remained for just over three weeks before Ernest embarked at the port of Devonport for the two week outward-bound voyage to Alexandria in Egypt. On arrival, Ernest was immediately posted to the 596th Company of the Army Service Corps, and after a month's acclimatisation, Ernest boarded the Steamship 'Huntsend', and finally arrived at the southern port of Basra in Mesopotamia (*modern day Iraq*) on 10 January 1916. It would seem that Ernest and his unit had mostly served in an area between Basra and Baghdad throughout their time in the deserts of Mesopotamia, and as a driver its unclear as to exactly how much action he would have seen if any; however, it was illness and disease which was to take the life of Ernest Wright, a death which was even more tragic, as the First World War had finally come to its bloody conclusion just eleven days earlier. After being attached to the 3rd Corps H.Q. Motor Transport Company it seems that Ernest had contracted Smallpox; and by 14 November 1918, he was hospitalised at the No 22 C.F.A (*Combined Field Ambulance*) stationed at Shabana Barracks, Shahraban, (*north east of Baghdad*) and with the medical facilities probably at a basic level at best, Ernest Wright sadly lost his battle for life on Friday 22 November 1918, with his remains eventually removed to Baghdad, where his body now lies in the Baghdad (*North Gate*) War Cemetery.

Just over two weeks after his death, two separate obituaries appeared in the *Oxford Times* on Saturday 7 December 1918, with both obituaries containing the same basic information.....

...Wright - November 22nd of Smallpox after three years continuous service in Mesopotamia with the Motor Transport, Army Service Corps, Pte Ernest John Wright, the beloved husband of Ethel Maud Wright, 32 Hurst Street, Oxford, and eldest and beloved son of John and Mary Wright, 49 Marlborough Road, Oxford, aged 32 years. -

...Pte Ernest John Wright 32, died in Mesopotamia on November 22, of Small-pox. He was the husband of Ethel Maud Wright of 32 Hurst Street, and the eldest son of John and Mary Wright of 49 Marlborough Road. He had served for three years in Mesopotamia with the Motor Transport, Army Service Corps.

Twelve months later, two separate *In Memoriam* appeared in the *Oxford Times*, the second of which also contained a commemoration to his younger brother who had lost his life whilst he was serving with the Royal Navy December 1915 ...*Wright, - In proud and loving memory of Ernest John Wright who died in Mesopotamia November 22, 1918, R.I.P. - "Giving his life for his country, his soul to God".....Wright, - In loving memory of my dear boys Ernest John Wright, who died in Mesopotamia November 22, 1918, and Arthur Wright, who lost his life in the sinking of H.M.S Natal December 30, 1915, - from their Mother, Father and Sisters, 49 Marlborough Road, Oxford. - "Hard though it is we try to say, Father, thy will be done"* Yet another *In-memoriam* appeared the following year, but it was to be the year after this that a rather touching *Memoriam* appeared which had supposedly come from his son Reginald, and was published on the front of the *Oxford Times* in an edition dated November 18, 1921.....*Wright, - In proud and loving memory of my dear daddy, Ernest John Wright, who died November 22nd 1918, R.I.P - from Reggie. - "Thy will, not mine, be done."*

It's interesting to note that his army service records contains a number of inaccuracies, as the year of his marriage is out by one year (*Ernest had married in 1910, not the previous year as stated on his army service records*) his son's date of birth is also incorrect by seven days, and

his own date of birth is recorded as 21 August 1886, and not 21 February 1887 as recorded in the baptism register of St Aldates Church, with the year of his birth confirmed by the record of his birth being held by the General Register Office as March ¼ 1887.

CWGC Details.

Wright, Ernest John,
 III Corps, HQMT Coy, Army Service Corps,
 Rank, - Private, Service No, - M2/131588,
 Date of Death, - 22/11/1918, Aged, - 32.
 Memorial, Buried Baghdad (North-Gate) War
 Cemetery, Iraq, Grave Ref, - IV F 3.

Medal Entitlement.

A.S.C Pte, M2/131588,
 Medals awarded, Victory Medal,
 British War Medal, 15 Star.
 Date of Entry, 20/11/1915, Egypt,
 Remarks, Died - 22/11/1918.

Son of Mr and Mrs Wright; husband of Ethel Maude Batram (formally Wright) of Northfield Cottages, Watereaton, Kidlington, Oxon.

Within twelve months of Ernest's death, his wife Ethel had remarried in Suffolk, when on the 19 November 1919, she married (labourer) George Batram, and this was followed by the birth of her second child the following summer. Previous to this, Ethel Wright (who passed away in 1971 aged 85), had received the meagre army pension of just twenty shillings and eight pence a week (approx £1.03p) for herself and her young son which took effect from 9 June 1919. With the death of Ernest, John and Mary Wright had suffered the unimaginable loss of losing six of their eight children, yet on a happier note both of their daughters had eventually married with Nelly marrying at St Aldates on the 2 July 1917, and Margaret on the 17 March 1919.

Ernest was also commemorated on the War Memorial of St Matthew Church, Grandpont.

Reference of driving experience of Ernest John Wright who is desirous of entering in the M. T. A. S. C. as a driver.

I certify that Ernest John Wright has been in my employ from 1915 to 1918 a total of three years and one month. During that time he drove the following four for the following periods:

TYPE	PERIOD	AP
Morris Defted	Two & a half years	
Ford	Driving Periods	
Mors, Ambulance	"	
Beluze, "	"	
TOTAL	Four	

He is unable to do running repairs.

Signed [Signature]

* Number in words
 † Number of different makes in table below (words).

M/131588. 19 Bucknell
 for Riccarton
 G.S.O.

Dear Sir

I am writing to
 that I have received the Memorial
 scroll of my late husband
 Ernest J Wright 131588. A.S.C. M.T.S.
 which I shall value, with thanks.

24 JUL 1920
 10 22 - G.S.O.

Two documents from the service records of Ernest Wright.