

Herbert Jones

Baptised in St. Stephen the Martyr's Church, Newtown Row (since demolished) on 17 September 1900, Herbert is the youngest man to be listed on the WW1 Memorial in Aston Parish Church. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission give his age at death as 16 years, below what should have been the minimum age for enlistment, but perhaps as surprising is that Herbert was enlisted in the Canadian Infantry.

Herbert's short life does not look to have been the easiest. Born to William and Mary Jane Jones, Herbert was one of seven children, and at the 1911 census the family, minus his eldest brother William but including the widowed father of Mary Jane, were living in a three-roomed house on Asylum Road. Conditions must have been cramped for six children and three adults, and although his father and two elder siblings worked, none were in skilled jobs, so income was limited.

Things took a turn for the worse when, some time before 1913, Herbert's father died. And on 27 May 1913, Herbert and his brother Howard set sail from Liverpool aboard the ship *Mongolian* bound for Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. They were 12 and 10 years respectively. The brothers were unaccompanied, along with over 100 other children, mainly boys. The ship's manifest said that the children were on 'contract tickets' and certainly Herbert and Howard were on tickets purchased by Children's (Middlemore) Emigration Homes. Established in Birmingham by John Middlemore, he believed that orphans and destitute children were best served by emigration to Canada, and the Homes gave skills training to prepare them for work in their new country. We don't know when Herbert and his brother were placed into a Home, but at such a young age and having suffered the loss of their father, they must have been both frightened and bewildered. To sail half-way round the world would have been beyond comprehension. Their mother remarried on 12 April 1913, before they departed, but perhaps it was too late to stay their departure, perhaps finances hadn't improved, or perhaps it was felt they were going to a better life.

On arrival in Canada children were placed with families; life wasn't always good for these children, and records of abuse are common. Perhaps it is not surprising then that on 27 December 1915, in Truro, Nova Scotia, Herbert enlisted in the Canadian Infantry, lying about his age to do so. His occupation was listed as lumberman, a tough job for a 14 year old. He had been in Canada little more than two years, and whether this was a ploy on Herbert's part to get paid passage back to England we will never know. Herbert didn't leave Canada until July 1916, sailing from Halifax on *SS Empress of Britain*, arriving in England on 25 July. He wasn't back in England for long, and we can only hope that he saw some of his family, but by October 1916 he was definitely in France.

Herbert went missing, and was presumed dead, on Easter Monday 9 April 1917. The day was cold, with sleet and snow. This was the first day of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, a four-day engagement involving around 100,000 men, mainly from Canadian Divisions. Fighting was brutal, and nearly 3,600 men lost their lives. Vimy Memorial is the main Canadian Memorial for all Canadians who died in WW1, and it bears the names of more than 11,000 servicemen, like Herbert, who have no known grave.