

Arthur Thomas Barnett

Arthur was the oldest of five children born to Arthur and Esther Barnett. He was baptised alongside his new-born sister Rosa at Aston Parish Church in February 1907, aged 2 years old, then living in Vicarage Road, his father a gunsmith.

We know that Arthur enlisted in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment on 9 May 1912, stating he was 18 years old, but birth registration records would make him at least 5 months short of that. It may be that home life was difficult; his mother was not living with his father at the time of the 1911 census, and it looks very much like Arthur was in Winson Green Prison at that time. Perhaps enlisting in the army offered him a better life or at least some focus and discipline. As a territorial Arthur was made a full-time part of the Regiment on 5 August 1914, within days of the outbreak of war.

Arthur was sent to France as part of the Expeditionary Force on 22 March 1915, serving there until 6 July 1916. In November 1915 Arthur was given leave to go home, almost certainly to attend the funeral of his father who had died. Arthur did not return to duty immediately, and was removed from the unit's strength at that time. He did return however, and was wounded, a gunshot to the right arm, on 1 July 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, when the 8th Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment, along with many other units, saw losses and casualties which were some of the worst of the Great War. He was sent back to England on 6th July, and he never returned for active service. He served at the Command Depot Sutton Coldfield from 5 August of that year, but was released for work on government contracts for the production of munitions and equipment for the war effort on 16 October 1916. He was finally discharged from the army in March 1917.

Arthur married Hilda Gertrude Prince on 27 July 1917 at Aston Parish Church, and was living with her at 146 Yew Tree Road. He was a welder, no doubt working in one of Aston's many industries. Just four months later Arthur sadly died in Aston; this was before the birth of his daughter Daisy Hilda on 22 December.

Despite his significant service in France, Arthur is not listed as War Dead with the Commonwealth Graves Commission, neither is he listed in the Memorial Book for the 8th Battalion. This relates to the regulations – death needed to have been the result of wounds or disease which were inflicted or contracted during active service, and this presumably was not the case. His widow received a war pension, and he received his war medals, but there is no official memorial to him that reflects his contribution to the war. It is all the more fitting then that his name appears on the Aston Memorial.