

William Allen Talbot



William was born in 1898 in Wednesbury, Staffordshire to parents William and Maud. It is not clear when William moved to Aston, he was still living in Wednesbury in 1911, but he started working in the foundry, heavy engineering, of GEC Witton Works, Electric Avenue, around 1914. GEC was a major employer in Aston, with the heavy engineering works manufacturing power plants for munition works and ships, and would have attracted men from surrounding areas to move to Aston to get work. William lived at 115 Holte Road. The Talbot family appear to have retained connections with Aston; William's younger brother Albert Ernest married at Aston Parish Church in 1927, resident at the same address.

It is likely that William enlisted with the Royal Warwickshire Regiment (Regimental number 330245) in Aston, initially as a reservist. There had been a big push in 1914 to raise numbers in the Territorial Army, as the reservists were called, and his photograph shows a young man, wearing a RWR cap badge, probably no older than 16 years. The GEC Memorial Book says he joined the Colours (i.e. main regiment) in 1917, then aged 18, and that he was sent to France in 1918.

William was killed in action on 27 August 1918, but by then he was serving with the Princess Charlotte of Wales's (Royal Berkshire) Regiment, 8th Battalion (Reg No 220742). Changes of regiments for soldiers were not unusual, as they were often moved to strengthen units that had been depleted through losses in battle. It is possible he might have been wounded while serving in the Warwicks, and moved to another regiment on returning to fitness. I tried to find out about his service in the Warwicks – but the records appertaining to him, plus many others, were destroyed during the London Blitz.

Between 25 August -3 September the 8th Batallion Royal Berks was part of a very large battle group engaged in what is now known as the Battle of Scarpe (near Arras, Somme, France), itself part of the Hundred Days Offensive (8 August to 11 November 1918), a concerted offensive which ended WW1. On 27 August, heavy rains during the night had made conditions very difficult, and stiff resistance from the Germans and their heavily defended positions gave limited gains. 1926 men died that day, 1389 from British forces, with a large part of the remainder being Canadian. William was one of forty-two men of the 8th Batallion to die. William is buried in the CWGC cemetery at Becordel-Becourt, Somme, France in an area of the cemetery used specifically for burials from this period.