

Arthur Heath

1887 - 1915

[Believed to be "Arthur E. Heath" listed on the memorial]



Educated at Grocers' Company's School, Hackney Downs, and New College Oxford

Classics tutor at New College Oxford

Died near Loos, aged 28, on 8 October 1915

Family and Education

Arthur George Heath was born in Hackney, London, on 8 October 1887, the son of George Henry Heath and Eliza Mary Coates. George had been a solicitor's general clerk in 1871, and by 1901 he was Assistant Principal Clerk in the Inland Revenue, and had four daughters and two sons. The family seems to have inherited significant money from both sides.

Arthur attended the Grocers' Company's School, 'excelling at almost everything he touched'. He gained a scholarship to New College and began there in 1905, graduating with First Class in Classics in 1909. He was immediately elected a Fellow of New College, but spent a year in France and Germany before settling as a Classics tutor, lecturing in modern philosophy, and taking his MA. He continued to be an active member of the students' Wesley Society at Wesley Memorial (the forerunner of JWS, the John Wesley Society). In 1914 he won the Green Moral Philosophy Prize.

War Service: 6th (Service) Battalion, Queens Own (Royal West Kent Regiment)

Arthur joined up as soon as war broke out, when his family was living in Bromley, Kent. He joined the newly formed 6th Battalion of the Queens Own (Royal West Kent Regiment) as a Second Lieutenant. This unit landed in Boulogne on 1 June 1915, entering front-line trenches on 23 June and suffering significant losses: these may have prompted Arthur's promotion to Lieutenant. Despite being

diagnosed with blood poisoning shortly after landing, Arthur was at the front in July, when he received a scalp wound.

On 11 July Arthur wrote to his mother:

‘Will you at least try, if I am killed, not to let the things I have loved cause you pain, but rather to get increased enjoyment from the Sussex Downs or from Janie [his youngest sister] singing folk songs, because I have found such joy in them, and in that way the joy I have found can continue to live’.

In September the unit moved towards the Loos front, arriving on 29 September and relieving outgoing units at the Hulluch Quarries. There it experienced heavy artillery fire, and lost its Divisional commanding officer to a shell. On 8 October the Division repelled a heavy German infantry attack. Arthur was shot in the neck and died almost immediately, having said ‘Don’t trouble about me’. It was his 28th birthday. His body could not be recovered and he is remembered on the Loos memorial. His platoon sergeant wrote to his parents that a few minutes before Arthur’s death the sergeant had heard someone exclaim: ‘What a man! I would follow him anywhere’. His probate amounted to £994 3s 8d.

A memoir of Arthur’s life by Gilbert Murray, and his letters, was published as ‘Letters of Arthur George Heath’.

Arthur’s brother Thomas (not an Oxford student) joined the Royal Army Medical Corps. He served in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) and the Afghan campaign until 1921, finishing as a Captain. He applied for his own and Arthur’s medals together.

This is the story of one of the men who appear on a war memorial at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church in Oxford, UK. These stories were compiled in 2018-19 from a variety of family history and military sources. In particular, Chris Baker’s site, ‘The Long, Long Trail’ has provided valuable details of the men’s experience of battle:

<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/>

Arthur Heath’s story is based on details of his life in ‘Letters of Arthur George Heath’ by Gilbert Murray, published in 1917 by BH Blackwell, Oxford. It includes information from Oxford University archives. Photo by permission of The Warden & Scholars of New College Oxford.