

Arthur Skuce

1892 - 1917

Born in Oxford

Gentleman's outfitters shop assistant

Died of wounds inflicted near Ypres, aged 24, on 8 October 1917

Family

Arthur Skuce was born in Oxford on 9 October 1892. His father was John Skuce and Arthur's mother, Emma Caroline King, was his second wife. Both parents were born in Oxfordshire. In 1871 John was a railway clerk, but Emma's father was a coal merchant, and by 1881 John had become a traveller in coal. The family lived in Jericho, Oxford, and Arthur was the ninth of twelve children - two were baptised at Walton Street Methodist Church.

By 1899 John had opened a butcher's shop at the family's home in Walton Street, but by 1911 it was run by one of Arthur's brothers. John had returned to being a colliery agent and had moved to East Oxford with his wife, Arthur, and several of his other children. Arthur, aged 18, was a shop assistant in a gentleman's outfitters. In March 1914 John died and was buried at Wolvercote.

War Service: Seaforth Highlanders; then 9th then 6th Battalion, Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry

When war broke out Arthur enlisted as a Private in the Seaforth Highlanders, which drew in a number of Oxfordshire men. He appears to have gone to France on 7 November, and he was awarded the 1914 Star for those who served before 22 November (when the First Battle of Ypres ended). Towards the end of August 1915 he was appointed a Second Lieutenant in the 9th (Reserve) Battalion of the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry.

The following year on 12 September he was posted to the 6th Battalion, in the 20th (Light) Division, during the Battle of the Somme. So many of its men had been killed, wounded or were missing that the unit was down to less than a third of its full strength. From 17 September Arthur was once more defending trenches in the front line, and in early October his battalion successfully counter-attacked at Transloy but suffered heavy casualties. They were rewarded with two months rest, and it was probably at this time that Arthur was promoted to Lieutenant. In January 1917 Arthur's battalion was back in the front line repulsing attacks, and in March they followed the German retreat to the Hindenberg Line.

Their next major attack was at Langemarck in August. Afterwards they were once again severely below strength, and Arthur was promoted to Captain. Then on 20 September he led 'A' Company towards Poelkapelle and got within 70 yards of their objective. He was seriously wounded and evacuated back to England: on 26 September he was admitted to Queen Alexandra Military Hospital at Millbank. Arthur died on 8 October 1917 at the age of 24.

Arthur's funeral service took place at Wesley Hall, later renamed Cowley Road

Methodist Church. There was a procession down the Cowley Road with a pipe and drum band, and the hearse and carriages then proceeded to Wolvercote Cemetery where Arthur was buried alongside his father and a brother who had died in 1902. An inscription on the grave says 'A good man and a gallant soldier'. Arthur's probate record showed he left £213.

This is the story of one of the men who appear on the war memorial of Walton Street Methodist Church, which can now be seen at Wesley Memorial Methodist Church in Oxford, UK. These stories were compiled in 2019 based on research by Stephanie Jenkins (http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/war/walton_street_chapel/index.html), supplemented by information from a variety of military sources. Some of the details of Arthur's service were provided by the Soldiers of Oxford Museum, Woodstock. A detailed account of the action of 20th (Light) Division is available on Wikipedia.